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## LARRY MURTAGH'S MISSING EAR CASE —or— A CLEW TO THE MURDER OF LANGLEY, THE BROKER. By Bernard Wayde \*



The shot came, evidently, from the open door of the brownstone front.



# Larry Murtagh's Missing-Ear Case;

OR.

## A CLEW TO THE MURDER OF LANGLEY, THE BROKER.

By Bernard Wayde.

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### CHAPTER I.

It is one of the fashionable squares of New York City. It matters little that we name the locality, for a hundred to one the majority of our readers would not recognize it if we did.

Enough that this particular square was very exclusive.

The center had a park guarded by tall, iron railings.

In the middle of the square was an elaborately-designed fountain, which in summer was the pride of that portion of the city.

In the summer season, too, the park was a very paradise of trees, flowers and plants—foreign and native—and much care and money had been expended to make it one of the very ideal spots of fashionable city life.

But it is now winter, and the square has a dreary and desolate aspect, without leaf or flower.

The tinkling music of the fountain is heard no longer, nor the note of a solitary bird save the hardy sparrow, which may be found there at all seasons, only a little more aggressive, perhaps, as the iron-bound frost sets in.

The initial scene of our story opens on a wintery night in the year 1887.

Midnight has already clanged from the big city clocks, and with it comes a brisk snowfall which has been threatening for hours.

On the four sides of the square of tall "brownstone fronts" only one solitary light flashes out—this from a fourth-story window.

The room is illuminated by several gasjets apparently; the face of a man in his prime may be seen occasionally peering into the night.

Sometimes his features are glued for a minute at a time against the frozen panes of glass as if to get a better view of the square, which is by no means as well lighted as it might be.

Is this silent watcher expecting some one, that he peers so often into the night?

Or is it merely a nervous, uneasy habit of the man's?

He has been at the fourth-story window at least a dozen times already, and the same anxious look pervades his face each time.

The silence is strangely impressive at this hour.

Not a breath of air is stirring, and only the indescribable rustle of the falling snowflakes as they reach the ground can be heard.

Thus passes a quarter of an hour more, then another quarter, with the snow on the increase, through a chilly, almost moveless, atmosphere.

About fifty yards from the house containing the solitary light, looks out the feeble gleam of a street lamp.

This lamp stands in the southeast corner of the square, and, for all the aid it gives to dissipate the darkness, it might as well be extinguished, for it by no means serves to

give any definite view of anybody who might be approaching.

Suddenly the dead stillness is broken by the sharp crack of a whip, followed by the muffled sounds of carriage wheels.

The watcher in the fourth-story window must have heard these sounds, for he is back again at his post, looking down into the square.

Then a vehicle turns the corner, with its flashing side lights.

This is what the watcher has been expecting, doubtless, for the anxious look on his face seems less pronounced than before.

The carriage stops within a few feet of the street lamp which we have described.

The door facing the sidewalk opens, a man steps out, says something to the driver.

Then the carriage wheels around and disappears.

The passenger, who is tall and stalwart of build, and enveloped in an ulster, stands like a grim statue for several moments, with eyes strained toward the northeast angle of the square.

He, too, is apparently waiting for somebody.

Nor has he long to wait.

For through the clouds of descending snow come sounds of a rapidly-driven vehicle, then the flashing side lamps, as in the first instance, followed by a sudden pulling in of the horses.

This occurs at a distance of about fifty yards from where the first man stands.

The same preliminaries have been gone through with as before.

The second man alights from his conveyance, exchanges a few words with the driver, then the vehicle acts as the other had done, by vanishing around a corner.

All this has been observed by the mysterious watcher in the fourth-story window.

But if one might judge by the play of his features he does not appear to be at all surprised at what has occurred, and is seemingly waiting now for what will follow.

He takes one precaution, though, to move somewhat back from the window, where he can see without being himself seen.

We can perceive as he steps forward that the second arrival is similarly attired to the first—with this exception—that his head is covered by a slouch hat, which comes away over his forehead, whereas the other's headgear is of fur with ear lapels, while the lower part of both men's faces are partly hidden in heavy woolen mufflers.

The watcher in the fourth-story window is all-observant, and is plainly interested in the movements of the men described.

The last arrival, after a moment's hesitation, comes forward.



He can see by the dim light of the lamp the shadowy figure of the first man, standing still, almost motionless as at first.

He evinces no surprise, nor does he hesitate now, but approaches through the thick clouds of snow toward the person who is doubtless awaiting him.

Within a few yards of the still, statuesque form he stops.

Had both men turned just then and looked up at the fourth-story window of the "brownstone front" from which the solitary light shoots out, they might have caught the face of the strange watcher—a face illumined by mingled feelings of fear, hate and triumph.

But neither man does this.

They are too engrossed in each other, presumably, to heed anything else that might be occurring; and, indeed, their last thought would be to look up at the illuminated window where the mysterious watcher is taking note of their movements.

The men glance steadily at each other for several seconds, then the last arrival says:

"Mr. Langley, I am here at your request.

"Now, what is your object in having me meet you at this unseasonable hour?"

The query is evidently a surprise to the person addressed as "Mr. Langley," for, instead of replying, he regards his questioner with a puzzled expression.

"Well, sir, here I am. Now, what is it you want?"

He was plainly a choleric man, and spoke angrily.

His tones were those of a person with pronounced ideas, a person strong in his likes and dislikes.

His manner, too, was directness itself, and the other's seeming indecision and indifference angered him not a little.

A low chuckle escaped the man addressed as the other put the second question.

"I was about to ask *why you* had sent for *me*," he at last replied, emphasizing his words.

"I think with you that the hour is both unseasonable and unreasonable.

"And why you should have appointed a meeting with me at all passes my comprehension."

"I appointed no meeting," came from the other, angrily.

"If you say so, I tell you you lie!"

"Rather harsh words, Tom Masson," replied Langley, controlling himself with a great effort.

"I am not in the habit of hearing such language when applied to me from any man, and I won't stand it from you.

"So bridle your tongue, my friend; it may get you into trouble."

"Pshaw!" impatiently interrupted Masson.

"You deny it, do you?"

"Well, look at this."

Then from his coat pocket he drew a letter, the folds of which he opened with a trembling hand, not from fear, but from positive, downright rage, which he tried in vain to suppress.

"There's the proof of my words!" he cried with a cutting sneer.

"Deny that this letter came from you if you dare!"

"And prove that *this* is not *yours* if *you* dare!" Langley retorted hotly, as he produced a little note and held it up in the light of the street lamp.

Masson stepped forward, with an involuntary cry on his lips.

*This* he did not expect.

He thought the cause of the quarrel was all on his own side.

Just at that moment the letter fluttered from Langley's hand and fell into the snow.

Masson with a sudden exclamation stooped and picked it up.

Then brushing the snow from it, he glanced at the note with a look that almost baffles description.

"This is a forgery!" he exclaimed hoarsely, as some angry suspicion flashed across him.

"This is *your* work, Langley.

"This letter is your concoction.

"You have lured me here for some object—some vile, scoundrelly object known only to yourself alone.

"But I tell you, Stephen Langley, thief and forger, that you have for once overreached yourself.

"Don't try to lie any further, for it won't serve you."

"You're a madman and a fool, Masson!"

"You call me a thief!"

"You are the thief and the forger!"

"I can prove it—I can prove it!"

Langley was now beside himself with rage.

He had lost all his former poise of manner.

He was now furious.

To be called a thief and a forger!

The next moment the two men were at each other's throats, rolling over and over in the snow in a death struggle.

Suddenly the sharp crack of a pistol split the air.

It was Masson who had fired.

Whether this part of the programme had been expected by the solitary watcher in the fourth-story window, we shall not for the present say.

But of one thing we are sure.

The shot fired by Masson had taken no effect on his opponent, and it was during the continuation of the struggle between the two men that the light in the fourth-story window had vanished, and a second shot rang out, which stretched one of the struggling men bleeding and lifeless.

That shot came, evidently, from the open door of the "brown stone front."

It was Stephen Langley who fell, for a second later Masson had picked himself up, and after casting a look of terror around to discover whence the shot had come, he ran like a deer from the spot.

A few moments later Tom Masson was swallowed up in the thick snowstorm.

## CHAPTER II.

THERE are necessary details to explain in connection with the tragic occurrence described in the preceding chapter.

Therefore, for this purpose, we shall retrace our steps to the hour of two P. M. of the day on which the meeting took place between Stephen Langley and Tom Masson, or maybe we would be more accurate in saying the day before, as the *rencontre* between the men occurred some forty minutes after midnight.

The clock in the office of Murtagh & Co. had just chimed the hour of two, when in walked the hero of this story—Mr. Laurence Murtagh.

It was his first appearance that day.

Our old friend, Tom Blanchard, was awaiting the head of the firm with some impatience.

He did not quite know how to account for his partner's absence, as an important call had been made for Murtagh some hours previously.

It was a case indeed which the junior member of the firm would like to have undertaken himself, and would have been only too well pleased to have done so.

But the order was imperative that Murtagh, as soon as he arrived, should call at Exchange Place, as the case was of more than ordinary moment.

Now, in this particular *locale* we all know was situated the great Pinkerton Agency, under the management of "Bob" Pinkerton.

"I can't tell you how glad I am you have come," greeted Blanchard, as he shoved a note into his principal's hand.

"Goodness knows of my uneasiness and impatience since eleven o'clock, wondering what had become of you, and hoping against hope that you would turn up at the eleventh hour even.

"Mr. Pinkerton's messenger has been here three times already—and I should have made a go at it myself and got the particulars.

"But instructions were that he would have none but you.

"Under the circumstances what could I do but wait?"

"You did quite right, Tom," said Larry, as he folded the note after reading it and thrust it in his pocket.

"None of this glib comes your way, my boy—and I was about to observe 'more's the pity,' but I won't," the genial Irishman added, laughing; "and I needn't say you have long since discovered how selfish I am in this respect."

Observing a frown on Tom's good-natured face, he went on gayly:

"It's not that, either, my dear fellow.

"So far as that is concerned, you know what's yours is mine, and what's mine's my own.

"But, jesting aside, this chap 'Bob' labors under the impression that I am the great I am, especially in the unraveling of intricate cases, which you know as well as myself is all bosh."

"What is the nature of the case?" questioned Tom, a world of curiosity in his blue eyes.



"Is it a murder, robbery, forgery, an elopement, or a bank president?"

"Now, my dear fellow," replied Larry, with mock solemnity, "I know you are a *little* hard on bank presidents, and are forever suspecting them of wrongdoing.

"But you might as well ask me whether the delinquent is an archbishop.

"Not knowing can't say.

"I must find that out when I get to Exchange Place.

"For the present calm your curiosity, and on my return I may let you into the secret—that is, if you're a very good and obedient partner."

"Get out, you heathen!" snapped Tom.

"Yes, I was just about thinking that would be the very best plan to get rid of your impertinent questioning.

"Ta-ta, dear boy, and while I'm gone I intrust you with a very grave responsibility."

"What's that?" asked Blanchard, who certainly was not of a humorous character.

"Pray let no one run away with the office or the office cat, Tom—that's a good fellow."

And the Irishman made a dash for the door, neatly dodging a work on medical jurisprudence which was hurled at him.

Of course this was one of the occasional scenes of an equally inspiring character which occurred in that office, and which meant simply nothing more than an exchange of civilities and affection between the two partners.

Blanchard, as we have said before, was totally devoid of humor, yet, somehow, he could enjoy a joke with the best of his conferees in Gotham.

When Murtagh dashed out of the office and down the stairs, a messenger from Robert Pinkerton was returning for the fourth time.

"I am just in time," said the young man, who bore the oft-repeated message.

"Yes, I perceive you are," interpolated Larry; "you were high in time to get a double-Nelson or a fractured collar bone.

"But as you are no wrestler, I'll let it go at that.

"But what's the trouble?"

"Is Exchange Place on fire?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Murtagh," said the messenger; a sad-faced lad, who could not understand anything funny in chasing the noted Irishman round for half a day—"I beg your pardon, sir," he dolefully repeated, "but Mister Bob has been giving me the dickens for not finding you.

"He said, in fact, that I didn't know my business, to let a—"

"And maybe the honorable Mr. Robert was right, my boy," Murtagh interrupted, with a broad grin.

Then, seeing the messenger was about to deliver a harangue on his valuable services to the great detective establishment on Exchange Place, he cut him short with:

"Yes—yes—I understand all about it!

"Pinkerton has been waiting for me some hours, and is anxious that I should call immediately, if not sooner.

"But here, my lad"—in a kindly tone—"take this; go and enjoy yourself; the rest of the day is your own, remember that—"

"But, Mr. Murtagh, sir, I—"

"I shall not hear another word; do as I tell you; I will explain your absence to Mr. Robert, who will no doubt thank me for my thoughtfulness.

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, my dear young man."

And with these words, and putting a five-dollar bank note into the young man's hand, Murtagh was off like a shot.

"Well, of all the crack-brained Irishmen, Laurence Murtagh, Esquire, takes the cake.

"But he's such a good-natured fellow that one can't be offended with him.

"Well, when he says—'go—enjoy yourself,' he means it; that he does; every time, you bet."

"I hope you'll never die, Laurence Murtagh, Esquire, till every hair on my head is a mold-candle to light you to glory."

And still glancing lovingly at the five-dollar bill, the Pinkerton messenger lad hied him to the nearest hostelry to drink, with three or four cronies, the kind-hearted Irishman's health.

"Yes," said Larry, as he pursued his way down Nassau Street; "I don't quite know what's up with me to-day—I'm as skittish as a hundred and fifty year old Ballymountain goat—I neither know the end of me pocket, nor the end of me wit.

"Some change in the moon, an' divil doubt of it. I'll

tell off a committee to inquire into my sanity—as if all the medical experts in the world could tell a single thing about it—though each has his idea that he can, no doubt.

"I've no doubt, either, but that that young fellow will think I'm a loon.

"The idea of giving him a V and telling him to go away for the day—I must be mad—mad as a March hare, indeed."

We will hazard this, however, that the Irish detective was not alone the sanest but the best balanced man in New York or out of it; and in this particular, no doubt the readers of the "Murtagh Series" will bear us out—on the understanding that, "A little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men;" and, we were going to say, women, but here we shall cry a halt.

Murtagh, in a graver mood than he had yet shown that day, entered Robert Pinkerton's private office, which we have described in a previous story of this series.

Mr. Pinkerton, as was usual with him when in an impatient mood, was pacing his room with knitted brows, and muttering some unpleasant remarks—doubtless in regard to Mr. Murtagh—when that gentleman entered, without even announcing himself.

"Hum! and so you *have* come, have you?" said Robert, stopping in his walk and glaring at his friend.

"I was just about getting tired of waiting, and was—"

"Going to engage somebody else, is that it?" cried Larry.

"Well, I'm sure you're welcome to engage whom you please.

"But shake, my dear fellow!

"What's the matter now? You appear half worried to death."

"Two confounded Wall Street brokers at loggerheads," explained Pinkerton.

"And if we don't stop their little game there will be murder!"

### CHAPTER III.

LARRY MURTAGH was not greatly in love with the case which Robert Pinkerton had to offer him.

Only a squabble between two Wall Street brokers!

That was nothing new.

It was a daily and nightly occurrence in fact.

"If half these fellows were out of the way," he said, sourly, "the world would be the better of it."

But Larry was sore just then on Wall Street, and all connected with that delectable locality.

For he had been recently "skinned," using a vulgarism, out of ten thousand dollars by the same agency.

So far as the Irishman was concerned, the investment had been open and above board, and thoroughly honest.

But it was the other way with the agents to whom he had confided his hard-earned dollars.

They had swindled him for fair; and what was still worse he had no manner of redress from the law courts.

It was simply legalized swindling, and he had to grin and bear the brunt of his loss.

But as this has nothing to do with the present story we shall proceed.

"Who are the brokers?" Larry asked after awhile, as in his mind arose the picture of a certain gentleman whom he had entrusted his good money to.

"Do I know them?"

"Yes," grinned Pinkerton; "I guess you have good cause to know one of them—Tom Masson, a former bucket-shop proprietor."

Murtagh's face darkened at once at the mention of the name.

The man was the one who had robbed him in a legal way.

"Tom Masson!" he repeated, vindictively.

"Yes, that is so; I've good cause to recollect him.

"But what's he been up to this time?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you."

Larry Murtagh plumped himself into a chair with a thud.

The inevitable box of cigars (imported from a friend in Havana) was produced by Pinkerton.

"Soothe your nerves, my dear fellow," he said, passing the box, "and I will give you the particulars.

"The case is more portentous than you think for, and it may perhaps enable you to get even with a gentleman whom you admire.

"I'm not joking at all in this."



"Hum!" mused the Irishman, taking a cigar and lighting it.

"Now fire away, and let me hear the worst, for the worst you can say about that person will in no way disturb me.

"But the other broker in the case—who is he?"

"Stephen Langley."

"Stephen Langley?" and Murtagh's features assumed a different expression.

"Nothing against him, I hope?" interpolated Bob, with a quizzical grimace on his handsome face.

"Nothing, sir, nothing."

"Then I can proceed?"

"Yes; you are now in order."

The Irishman lolled back in his chair and glared up at the ceiling, as if the picture of the man who had "buncoed" him was thereon deeply and doubly engraved.

"Well, the case stands thus," proceeded Pinkerton, as he struck a match and lit his "imported."

"Tom Masson and Stephen Langley were business partners once on Broad Street.

"During their partnership they formed the acquaintance of a gentleman named Darnley, of the firm of Darnley, Bliss & Blennerhasset, the Broadway bankers.

"Now, Darnley is one of the most prominent men in banking and brokerage in New York, and so far his reputation, in an honest business way, is irreproachable."

"I know all that," Murtagh interrupted absently. "Well, what then?"

"Mr. Darnley is a millionaire several times over, and a great railroad magnate. But Mr. Darnley has one weak spot."

"I never knew it," said Murtagh, still with his eyes riveted on the ceiling, and on the imaginary Tom Masson, whom he fancied at that moment he was placing behind iron bars.

"Please state the particular weakness?"

"The particular weakness," resumed Bob, slowly, "is his ward, Miss Sara Gunnison, who, by the way, is also his niece."

"That is news, to be sure," said Murtagh, warming up, and withdrawing his eyes for the first time from the ceiling, and fixing them on his friend.

"Of course, he's a bachelor?"

"Yes; in that you are right. He's had offers galore to break this bachelorhood, and would have done so to my knowledge a dozen years ago, but for this charge which sits upon him like a nightmare, and weighs him down like a ton of lead.

"This is the man's sole weakness."

"Why should it be so?" again from Murtagh, who resumed his inspection of the ceiling and his mental picture of Masson in convict garb.

"Is the young lady poor, rich or a multi-millionairess—like himself?"

"She is worth a half a million dollars, if not more," replied Pinkerton.

"Why doesn't he marry the girl, and be done with it?" growled the Irishman, still half-absently.

"What!"

"Why doesn't he marry the girl?"

"You forget, sir; she is his niece!" exploded Pinkerton, much shocked.

"Uncles are not in the habit of marrying their nieces, are they?"

"Sometimes," imperturbably from the detective. "Is Miss Gunnison young and good-looking?"

"What a question!" exclaimed Bob, with some indignation.

"The idea of asking whether a woman, especially an heiress, is young and good looking.

"Where do you think you'll go when you shuffle off this mortal coil?"

"Certainly she's young and good looking!"

"No rich spinster can be otherwise; for answer apply to the press of the country, which will have it that there is no rich young lady who is not positively charming and beautiful.

"But that is not the point, my friend.

"This young girl, Sara Gunnison, is absolutely charming in every way, and the lofty encomiums of the newspapers as to her beauty and goodness of heart are deserved, thoroughly so.

"The weakness, however, lies in this—that Darnley, not being a marrying man himself—and if he were he could not marry his niece—at least not in the face of the fierce opposition which would meet him—his weakness, I assert, lies in the fact that there are two, if not three, gentlemen

of questionable repute scrambling for her hand, which is enough to drive the multi-millionaire into his grave thirty or forty years before his time.

"Don't you see the point now?"

"Yes; but who are the gentlemen of questionable reputations?"

"I shall give you the names of two, which must suffice for the present."

"Well?"

"Stephen Langley and Tom Masson!" snapped Pinkerton.

"Oh! Still I can't see what there is to object to in the former.

"His conduct, so far as I have ever heard, has been without a flaw."

"True, saying the fact that he had been a partner once of Masson's."

"Well, if a man was born in a stable, that doesn't make him a horse," dryly interpolated Murtagh. "Then why object to the gentleman? Does he find favor in the lady's eyes?"

"Yes; of all her admirers, he is the most favored."

"Then Darnley should have no objection, if his niece has none.

"He is not a dog in the manager, I suppose?"

"Though it looks very much like it, by Jove!"

"But an old bach is invariably a selfish dog."

"The girl must marry sooner or later, and why not Langley?"

"Is he a bucket shop chap, too? If so I never heard it!" added Larry, still contemplating the ceiling.

"Yes, but reformed," interjected Pinkerton, dryly.

"Hah! That's a horse of another color."

"I don't wonder at Darnley objecting."

"Darnley has no objection," hastened to correct the ubiquitous Bob.

"Then what the d—l are you driving at?"

"Aren't you getting things mixed a little?"

"Won't you please come down from your lofty perch?" pleaded Pinkerton, seriously.

"What do you mean?"—from Larry, with some impatience.

"Your philosophical contemplation of the heights above you."

"The ceiling, you mean—of course you mean that."

"Exactly—the ceiling!"

"What do you see there that you are so profoundly absorbed?"

"Well, upon my life I see nothing particularly," replied Larry with a droll look, "saving the fact that it wants renovating pretty badly.

"Hum, I perceive, that I've not been paying the attention to your recital that I should have done.

"In point of fact, I wondered for a long time where this incoherent jumble was leading you to, for, upon my soul and honor, I could make neither head nor tail of your talk—with this exception that there was a fair, rich young maiden and three men in the case—one being her uncle, the wealthy old bachelor, Darnley.

"Now, my dear fellow," continued Murtagh, "let us be serious—what in the name of all that's good, bad and indifferent do you want me to do?"

"Don't contemplate that ceiling any more, I implore you, and I will give you the facts of this case in brief," said Pinkerton, who, now that he had secured his friend's attention, ran quickly over the following items:

"Early this morning"—this is how his story ran—"a man in livery called at my residence with a letter from Miss Sara Gunnison.

"In the note was an urgent request that I should call at once to the Darnley residence.

"I saw by the chirography that Miss Gunnison, when she wrote that note, must have been more than usually agitated.

"I did not at first know what to make of it, but to set my doubts at rest I hurried into my clothes, took a carriage and drove to the Darnleys'.

"In the reception room I found Miss Gunnison already waiting.

"She was pale and tearful, but soothing her as best I could, I sat down and prepared to listen to what she had to say.

"The trouble was caused by a letter which Langley had received the night before from Masson.

"She caught a glimpse of the note and recognized Masson's writing.

"From the few words she noticed she concluded that it was a challenge from Tom to his late partner to fight a duel to the death with either bowie knives or pistols.



"You know that both these men are Kentuckians.

"Ha!" suddenly exclaimed Pinkerton.

"Here comes Miss Gunnison herself."

#### CHAPTER IV.

As Robert Pinkerton spoke the door of the office was opened and Miss Sara Gunnison was announced.

Miss Gunnison was an exceedingly pretty woman of between eighteen and nineteen years of age—a decided brunette, with large, flashing gray eyes, and somehow reminded one of that Spanish type of beauty so often met in the west of Ireland.

She had none of the insipidity of the majority of your beautiful women, and one could only connect her with a strong intellect, backed by considerable will power.

Murtagh, who was an excellent physiognomist and judge of character, could not compare her with the weakling whom Robert Pinkerton had described a few moments before, whose very chirography evidenced a too easily excitable and emotional nature.

"This is no ordinary woman," communed Murtagh, as he arose on her entrance, "and if I am not mistaken, she is more adapted for strong measures than for weak ones."

"She may be lovely in character (outwardly), but I'll bet my blooming life she a thoroughgoing vixen when she's roused."

"The shedding of tears, unless for some great cause—and that cause solely and irreparably herself—would hardly become her."

"No, Mr. Robert Pinkerton, you are deceived, bamboozled, and the wool drawn over your eyes to a verity."

"Miss Sara Gunnison, you have some deeper object than an affection for Langley—and I'll be bound to say that you will surprise even an old stager like me, in perfidy."

"Oh, woman, woman," thought Larry, "how much you have to answer for here below, and what weak clay we are in your hands when you like to let yourself out a little."

But there was as much likelihood of the Irishman being wrong in his diagnosis of Miss Gunnison's character as he was of being right—indeed, more so.

For even physiognomists are not infallible—while phrenologists are simply nowhere, though the latter think they are at the top of the heap.

Miss Sara Gunnison had a marvelously sweet voice.

It was a voice once heard, not easily forgotten.

Bob Pinkerton, keen detective that he was, was smitten by it.

Not so Murtagh.

He thought some of the inflections were just at certain points a little overpitched—and certainly not natural.

For affectation, however skilled, can never seem natural—especially to those who have made the human voice a study for a good part of their lives, as the reader is aware was the case with the Irishman.

But to get to the point once more.

Miss Sara Gunnison was introduced to Murtagh by Mr. Pinkerton as though she were the most perfect of her sex.

Robert without a doubt was a very gallant man where a pretty woman was concerned.

Murtagh was no less gallant—it is a characteristic of his country and countrymen.

"Now, Miss Gunnison," began Bob, "you must not think for a moment that I was neglecting you in this case. I was simply awaiting the arrival of my friend, Mr. Murtagh, who, unfortunately, was out of town—"

"What a fib," muttered the Irishman under his breath. "But let him go on; he'll run himself into a hole, and it will fall to my unfortunate lot to get him out."

But the young lady did not allow the head of the Pinkertons to make any further misstatements.

She interrupted him with:

"This, then, is the gentleman you are entrusting my case to?"

Robert's head came down with a well-bred inclination.

"I think Mr. Murtagh the best man you could have given so delicate a matter to, for there is positively more in this unfortunate affair than you gentlemen think."

"Will Mr. Murtagh follow my instructions—or rather let me say suggestions—for it would be an impertinence for me to dictate to an expert in the present case."

"Now we're getting at it," thought Murtagh.

"I concluded she was a strong-minded young lady, and she is."

"Yes, madam," the detective added aloud, "you may make any suggestions you think fit."

"But as up to the present time I know little of the case, you no doubt will set me right where I am wrong."

"That is just the point," she added sweetly.

"It is not to be expected that you should know in twenty minutes that which has troubled my mind for that number of days."

"Precisely," interjected Pinkerton; "that is exactly the point."

"Detectives are not supposed to know everything—"

"Not to see through stone walls more than other people," added Miss Gunnison, with a silvery laugh, which went straight to the ubiquitous Bob's heart.

"This is a little more of her art," declared Larry to himself.

"A charming, amiable creature, no doubt."

"We'll get at her real character presently."

"You must know, Mr. Murtagh," continued this charming girl, with as little shyness or hesitation as any woman he had ever yet met with, "that in my own right I am heiress to over half a million dollars."

"So I've been informed"—from the Irishman, languidly.

Gentle Miss Gunnison began to pall on him.

The more he saw of her, the less he was impressed with her earnestness.

"But this money is held in trust until I am of age—that is, until I am legally entitled to it," she proceeded.

"My uncle, as you are also perhaps aware, is worth in the neighborhood of twenty million dollars."

Murtagh inclined his head and intimated that he was following her.

"Under those circumstances," continued Miss Gunnison, "such a little nestegg as mine would be of no earthly use to him, even were I to die to-morrow."

"And yet he is strangely opposed to a contemplated marriage which I have in view—for you know, Mr. Murtagh, flesh and blood is flesh and blood, and people must marry some time—"

"Not necessarily, madam," interjected the Irishman dryly.

"For instance, I am a bachelor—and an old one—but so far I have never contemplated marriage—"

"Certainly," interpolated Pinkerton maliciously; "of course there is no rule without an exception."

"My friend, Mr. Murtagh, as it happens, has never been touched by the tender passion."

"His heart, if I may say it, is unimpressionable—granite-lined and steel-plated, in fact."

"I should hardly credit Mr. Murtagh with lack of heart," insinuated Miss Gunnison in her most irresistible tones.

"But, gentlemen, if you will allow me, I will proceed."

Down went the detectives' heads in a gentle intimation that they were there for no other purpose than to listen to so charming a lady.

"Well, as I have said, my uncle, Mr. Darnley, objects to my marriage."

"But might I ask, madam, whom you are going to marry?" asked Murtagh quietly.

"Mr. Stephen Langley—and there comes the trouble," she responded.

"I understood he favored Mr. Langley?" said the Irishman, with a quick look at Pinkerton.

"Oh, dear, no!"—musically from the siren.

"On the contrary, he favors that gentleman's rival, Mr. Tom Masson."

"Oh, indeed!"

Another look at Pinkerton.

Robert blushed like a schoolboy who had been found out in some indecorous act.

"How the d—!" thought Bob, "did I get things mixed up so?"

"I could have sworn she said Langley was the favored man."

"Well, well, this is a nice how d'ye do!"

"I guess I'm smitten myself with the little witch, to have made such a gross misstatement."

"You must know," continued the fair Sara, "that Mr. Masson is my uncle's friend."

"Indeed," said Murtagh, fairly gasping with astonishment.

"Yes, Mr. Murtagh, Mr. Darnley regards Mr. Masson as his right arm, if I may be pardoned for using the expression."

"Excuse me if I say your uncle has exceedingly bad taste, madam," blurted out the now thoroughly aroused Irishman.

"It would be much better if he regarded him as his left—and kept him at confoundedly long range—for a bigger rascal is not out of—"



He was going to say "Sing Sing," when a vicious nudge from Pinkerton reminded him that he was treading on dangerous ground—and that he had better "draw in his horns," so he added "Wall Street" instead.

This was all very well.

But the amiable Miss Gunnison wouldn't have it that way, and added:

"Out of prison, you mean—and you are right, Mr. Murtagh."

"That man, Masson, is a rascal; and what surprises me most is that my uncle will countenance him—and have him a constant visitor at his house, while——"

Here Miss Gunnison hesitated and looked shyly at Pinkerton.

"While what, madam?"—from Murtagh, who mistrusted the woman more and more.

"He treats his former friend with contempt, and forbids him to see even me."

"Was there ever such contemptible conduct?"

"If he were not my uncle and I loved him, I should hate him!" ground out Miss Gunnison, in anything but a silvery tone—and while she said it her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved.

Was the woman only an actress, after all?

Murtagh had concluded long since that she was.

On the contrary Robert Pinkerton regarded her as the weak victim of a tyrannical uncle.

"And so your worthy uncle favors Mr. Masson as an eligible suitor for your hand?" said Larry, quietly.

"Yes, sir."

"And you regard him with——"

"Abhorrence, Mr. Murtagh, abhorrence!" snapped Sara.

"Do you think Mr. Darnley knows the real character of Mr. Masson?" the detective asked dryly.

"I really cannot say as to that."

"He knows that he is a Wall Street broker, of course."

"And his one-time connection with a bucket shop?" chimed in Murtagh.

"I think not."

"If he did, I don't think he would have anything further to do with him."

"How long has Mr. Darnley known Mr. Masson?"

"A little over six years, I believe."

"Less than six years ago he was the prime mover of a common bucket shop," rang in Murtagh, hotly.

"When did you find that out?"—from Robert Pinkerton, sarcastically.

"Too late to be of any use to me, worse luck," replied the Irishman.

"Had I known of it in time I should have been ten thousand dollars in to-day."

"But there! we all make fools of ourselves at times, therefore what cannot be cured must be endured—worse luck that such confounded rascals as Masson should be allowed to exist at the expense of honest folk."

"But he has not heard the last of that ten thousand dollars yet, you may rest assured," said Murtagh.

"And now, miss"—turning to Sara Gunnison—"we may as well once more revert to your matter."

"You expect this man Masson to have some designs on the life of Mr. Stephen Langley?"

"You say you saw a letter from him challenging that gentleman to a duel?"

"A moment, Mr. Murtagh," interrupted the woman.

"Pray allow me to explain."

"During Mr. Darnley's absence Mr. Langley called to see me."

"He was shown into the reception room, and while waiting took a letter from his pocketbook and began to read it."

"While Mr. Langley was thus engaged I stole into the reception room with the intention of giving him a little surprise."

"I drew so near him before he observed my presence that I was able to recognize the handwriting, and the few words I saw convinced me that it was a challenge from Mr. Masson."

"Almost at the same moment my uncle entered the room, and, in a towering passion, ordered Mr. Langley from the house——"

"Well?" said Murtagh, seeing Miss Gunnison hesitate.

"That is all, sir. I saw no more; I fainted."

"A likely story," the detective reflected.

"You fainted, eh? I don't credit a word of it."

"You are not that kind of woman."

"You must stop this duel, Mr. Murtagh," said Miss Gunnison, earnestly.

"Have you no further evidence that a duel is to be fought?"—ironically from the detective.

"Yes; I subsequently heard my uncle and Masson whispering—that is, some time after Mr. Langley was gone—and I distinctly heard the words:

"Your only chance now, Tom Masson, if you would have the ghost of a chance, is to rid yourself of that confounded Langley."

"That meant murder, Mr. Murtagh. Don't you think so yourself, Mr. Pinkerton?"

It was about four o'clock when Murtagh got back to his office, after having promised to do what he could to avert the expected duel between Miss Gunnison's lovers—Tom Masson and Stephen Langley.

And though he had promised this seriously, he regarded the whole thing as a farce—as to the meditated duel between the two men, at any rate.

But might there not be something deeper underlying it?

A queer idea came into Murtagh's mind.

What game was Miss Sara Gunnison playing?

Was she sane or insane?

Was she working out some deep-laid scheme with the subtlety of a crafty lunatic, or was her account all a pure invention, which it was not worth while bothering oneself with any further?

In this state of mind (not well knowing what to make of the affair), Murtagh got back to his office.

Blanchard was seated at his desk poring over some papers, which had been handed in that day by two prominent clients of the firm.

As Larry came in Blanchard put aside the papers upon which he had been engaged, and said:

"So you have come at last?"

"Yes. Any callers?" asked Murtagh.

"One! A queer-looking, pinched-up little man, who left this note for you."

Murtagh took the letter.

It was addressed in a bold, characteristic hand:

"LAURENCE MURTAGH, ESQ.  
Personal."

The moment he glanced at the handwriting he recognized it.

"When was this left?" he questioned.

"Just as the clock struck three."

"I asked the queer little chap if an answer was expected."

"He smiled and said: 'Please give this to Mr. Murtagh as soon as he comes in.'"

"Then without another word he went through the door as if he had been shot from a catapult, and, before I could follow, he was down the stairs and out in the street."

"I ran to one of the windows, threw it open, just catching sight of his coat-tails, as he disappeared into Nassau Street."

"And you didn't know who he was?" said Larry, with a laugh.

"Not from Adam's grandfather."

"How did that case go, Murtagh?" Blanchard inquired, as his partner tore open the envelope of the note.

Of course he alluded to the Pinkerton matter.

"If you mean the case in regard to which I was sent for by the Exchange Place people, I cannot enlighten you—not at present, anyhow."

"It's a jumble of which I can make neither head nor tail, in fact."

"But I will give you the particulars some other time."

"For the present we must rest satisfied to know little or nothing."

"This is the best I can say of it."

"And now I must see what this queer little chap has to say."

So saying, he unfolded the note and read the following:

"MY DEAR MR. MURTAGH.—If you will meet me to-night at the *Nag's Head*, Sixth Avenue, I may be able to put you onto good graft. It is more than likely that you will thank me for the trouble I have taken when you learn the particulars of my visit to your office. Knowing I would not find you in, I took the trouble of penning this, so that it might be sure to meet your eye. You know how opposed I am, in a matter of this kind, to hold intercourse with anybody but the right party. I do not care to confide in *underlings* or *middlemen*. Recollect, seven to-night, at the *Nag's Head*, and oblige

"Yours truly,

"MIKE MALLON,

"Alias Jimmy the Ped."

This was all.



But the note was characteristic of one thing—it's bold, dashing chirography.

It was the handwriting of a man of much force of character.

There could be no question of that, as any expert would tell you.

"Important?"

The question was put by Tom, who watched Murtagh covertly as he read the note.

"Yes, very much so."

"Who from?"

"The 'queer-looking, pinched-up little chap' who left it.

"Didn't you recognize him when he came into the office?"

"No."

"And yet you have met him a hundred times," replied Murtagh, smiling.

"I'll swear I never saw the little midget before"—from Blanchard, with much positiveness.

"Nonsense, my dear fellow; you know him well," declared Murtagh, emphatically.

"Who is he?"

"Jimmy the Ped."

"Mike Mallon?"

"Precisely—Mike Mallon, otherwise, Jimmy the Ped, the honestest rogue in this country."

"That chap must have had a good laugh at me," retorted Tom, ruefully.

"I treated the little jackanapes as if I had never seen him before."

"His disguise must have been good."

"Never a more perfect disguise in the world!"

"But had he stayed another minute here I should have known him, in spite of it."

"He took care to slip out before I saw through it—and he was down the stairs and out in the street like a flash. Confound the little runt!"

"Why confound him?"

"Because he deceived me—and deceived me badly at that."

"But to come to the point, what has he got for us?"

"I don't know yet. I have to meet him to-night."

"Meanwhile, I'll go and hunt up a friend of mine named Masson—the same gent who swindled me out of ten thousand good, honest plunks."

Before Tom Blanchard could say anything further, Larry was out of the office and down the stairs.

He made his way into Nassau Street, and thence into William.

At the time of which we write, at the corner of William Street and Maiden Lane, was a large saloon and restaurant owned by a German named Shultzenland.

As he kept a first-class establishment, he was liberally patronized by brokers who had their offices on Wall and Broad Streets—among the rest Mr. Tom Masson, whom Murtagh had met here for the first time, and who had finally succeeded in inducing the detective to invest his hard earnings in some speculations, which at that time had promised to pan out to his benefit.

And in this very place Mr. Masson had formulated his plans to make the Irishman one of the wealthiest detectives in New York, with a result as we have been told by Larry himself—a loss of ten thousand dollars.

The detective knitted his brows as he entered Shultzenland's.

It was not a pleasant reflection to know that he—a man noted for his skill in detecting thieves and confidence men—should have been so easily buncoed himself.

Masson's athletic form seemed again to loom up before him, and hardly had he entered the door when he saw the very man he was thinking of seated at one of the small, circular tables of the saloon with another gentleman.

Before them was a bottle of wine and two long-stemmed glasses—the bottle recently uncorked.

Masson's back was turned to Murtagh.

The other gentleman, in full view of the detective, was Mr. Darnley, the millionaire banker.

Here was point enough to bear her out in most of what she had said.

There was no two ways about it, Masson and her uncle were as thick as two pickpockets; or if not, why should the millionaire banker be on terms of such intimacy with the ex-bucket shopkeeper?

There they were, cheek by jowl, like two thieves, so to speak.

"Miss Sara is probably right after all," Murtagh muttered, "and Darnley is by no means the honest man the world believes him, or why should he associate with Masson, who is little better than a common thief and swindler?"

The Irish detective was in pretty much of a quandary.

Up to this moment neither of the men had seen him.

As we have said before Masson had his face turned away, and Darnley's mind was so much occupied with what the other was saying that the entrance of the detective whom he knew escaped him.

Of this fact Murtagh had not the remotest doubt.

For if the banker had seen him he would surely have given some sign of recognition.

That sign was absent.

Now what was Murtagh to do?

Go up to the table at which the two men were seated and face them with some half-jocular remark, or (which he deemed the more prudent) get out of the place without being seen by either.

Could he do the latter and still keep a watch on their movements.

At that instant he happened to look out into William Street.

"Just the very thing," he murmured.

What had caused this expression?

It is easily explained.

Looking up at Shultzenland's at the time was a small boy who might have been twelve or who might have been a few years older.

He bore the look of a street gamin.

His face was bronzed and as sharp as a hawk's, his hair jet black, and his eyes the keenest pair ever set in a human head.

Beneath his left arm he carried a bundle of "extras."

The detective quickly backed out of the door into William Street.

The two men in the restaurant had not seen him.

At least this was his conclusion.

The boy was turning into Maiden Lane when Murtagh put out after him.

A few steps and he and the detective were face to face.

"Stop one instant, Tom," said Murtagh.

"If you have nothing particular to do I have a little job that will pay you."

"What is it, Mr. Murtagh?" Tom asked.

He had been engaged at numerous times by the Irishman, and had given satisfaction in the most intricate cases.

Murtagh soon explained what he wanted of him.

"You know Masson, the broker, do you not, Tom?"

"Of course I do," replied the lad.

"It's the bucket shop chap you mean, isn't it?"

"Exactly."

"The one-time partner of Mr. Langley of Broad Street."

"I know both men well," Tom answered.

"I've sold them papers time and again, and Langley was a bright kind of gent, you bet."

"The man as could pull the wool over his eyes was a corker."

"He ain't on speakin' terms I hear now with Mr. Masson, and I don't wonder at it either," added Tom, "considerin' the reputation Masson has got."

Murtagh was obliged to interrupt the loquacious youth, who might have gone on in the same strain an hour longer, if he were not stopped.

"Tom," said the Irishman, "I want you to go now into Shultzenland's, and keep your eye on Darnley, the millionaire banker, and Tom Masson."

"Should they leave the restaurant," he pursued, "you will follow them wherever they go, and let me know what passes between them, and where they are to be located."

"I understand, Mr. Murtagh."

"But will it be necessary to take these 'extras'?"

"They may be in the way, you know," said Tom, naively.

"True."

"Dispose of them then in any way you like."

"How many have you in the pile?"

## CHAPTER VI.

THIS meeting was entirely unexpected by the Irishman. It worked up a whole host of conjectures in his mind.

Was he wrong, after all, in his diagnosis of Miss Gunnison's character?



"Two dozen, sir."

"H'm," said Murtagh, "give them to the first boy you meet, or do what you please with them."

"But say, Tom, don't be any longer than you can help."

"The 'extras' are on me, you know."

"Now off you go, and get rid of them."

Tom Doolan—for such was the lad's name—spied an old news-vender chum going along William Street.

"There's the Chickory Davis," he cried, as he caught sight of an ungainly-looking lad of fourteen or fifteen, "and as he is not doing so well just now, I couldn't act better than let him have the lot."

"It's not been the first time he's done the same service for me."

"All right," said Murtagh; "that will suit to a T."

"But do your business quickly with him, then come back."

Tom Doolan was not long in disposing of his stock of papers, and suffice it to say he sent one boy away rejoicing when he let him have his "extras."

When Doolan got through with Chickory Davis, he hastened back to Murtagh.

"Now," said the latter, "in with you into Schultzenland's, and keep an eye on Masson and the banker."

"If you do your part well it will be a twenty-dollar bill in your pocket."

"Be off now, and don't forget what I tell you."

"Be sure not to lose sight of them for an instant wherever they go."

"You can trust me for that, sir," the boy confidently answered; "the more especially as twenty-dollar bills are not to be picked up every day."

"But where am I to report to you, Mr. Murtagh?"

"Come to my office."

"Up to what time shall I find you, sir?"

"Six."

"All right, Mr. Murtagh."

And a moment later the boy was gone.

He watched Doolan disappear into Shultzenland's, then the detective left the spot.

"Had they seen me," Murtagh muttered, "it would have put them on their guard."

"The boy, on the other hand, will discover what they are up to without their ever suspecting him."

Murtagh, instead of going back to his office direct, as he meant to, hastened off in the direction of Exchange Place.

He concluded to see Pinkerton once more before proceeding further in the case.

It was as well, maybe, he came to this conclusion, as Pinkerton had made a rather important discovery since Murtagh had left him—at an earlier hour.

This was in relation to Darnley, the banker.

Pinkerton had gone off in the direction of Bowling Green to make inquiries at one of the transatlantic steamship offices in regard to the case of a confidential clerk who had absconded with ten thousand dollars, and who was supposed to have crossed the border, by way of Buffalo, into Canada.

But this, however, was only conjecture, it having been reported, too, that the clerk had gone to Philadelphia, and thence by some outgoing steamer to Europe.

Nothing definite was known of the man's movements, however, and Pinkerton was of the opinion that the fellow had not so much as left New York.

It is not necessary to name the steamship company, except to say it had its offices on Bowling Green, and that it plied to London and Glasgow.

Robert was far from suspecting that he would hear anything about Darnley from this source.

And he was agreeably surprised to learn from the manager of the company something that related to the banker's financial condition—a condition of affairs, indeed, which he was far from suspecting—the more especially with regard to a person who had such a high reputation for his immense wealth and honorable business standing.

Mr. Darnley's name had been brought up by the merest accident.

Said the manager, whose name we shall call Morrell:

"I have heard something that will doubtless surprise the financial circles of New York, and which affects the character of one of our most prominent bankers."

"It would be uncalled for to mention the matter, were it not for the fact that Mr. Turnour had some business transactions with him, of a character which is not very creditable to the gentleman whom I allude to."

"As you would never guess who it is, I shall tell you his name."

"You have heard, of course, of Darnley, the banker, of — Broadway?"

"Yes; much in regard to him no later than to-day," replied Pinkerton.

"Report in financial circles has put him down to be worth close on twenty million dollars," said Morrell, opening a notebook and glancing at some memoranda.

"And is he not?" questioned Pinkerton, deliberately.

"No, nor worth twenty thousand, let alone twenty millions," the manager of the company answered.

"The man is about the most stupendous fraud in New York, and in a few days, when his affairs are known, he will have to leave New York in disgrace."

"You surprise me," Pinkerton barely credited his ears.

"Yes, and others will be surprised, too, or I'm much mistaken," pursued Morrell.

"Why, the man is one of the most impudent swindlers in this country."

"I would call him one of the lowest blacklegs we ever had in this state."

"Have you proof for what you assert?"

"Decided and emphatic proof."

"But let me tell you how I came to discover about this man Darnley's character."

Robert Pinkerton nodded for him to proceed.

"You see," Morrell continued, "I received a communication yesterday from a firm of private detectives, requesting me to call at their office, adjoining Twenty-ninth Street and Broadway."

"The letter was couched in direct and emphatic language to the effect that Darnley and Turnour were engaged in a deal on Wall Street which strongly affected our interests, and that a call would furnish particulars that I would not for a moment dream of."

"This aroused my curiosity, and I resolved to go at once and see what it was all about."

"This detective firm, as it happens, is a new concern, comprised of two members, and a clerk who was in the habit of meeting Turnour."

"What are the names of the firm?"

"Ratchell & Raymond."

"Never heard of them."

"No; likely you did not."

"They have only been in New York a little over two weeks."

"They were originally members of the Chicago police force, and came on here to start a private detective agency."

"H'm!" said Pinkerton. "Without even a knowledge of the city!"

"I admire their grit and judiciousness certainly."

This last sarcastically.

"Well, you see," proceeded Morrell, "they depended on the experience of their clerk who has lived all his life in New York, and who, as I said before, was on terms of friendship with our confidential clerk, Turnour."

"Well, to be brief, I called on these two men, Ratchell and Raymond."

"They had two small offices shabbily furnished; you wouldn't give twenty dollars for all the furniture they had in the place, nor five dollars for all the clothes they had on their backs."

"But I never was one to go much on external appearances, as I have met the biggest rascals that ever lived, attired in the finest and most expensive clothing, with their gold, diamonds and all that; and Turnour, too, was one of that kind; so you see how one is apt to be deceived by appearances."

"Yes, you are not far out there," Pinkerton interjected.

"I've had the same experiences."

"Well, about these men, Ratchell and Raymond?"

"Did they seem to be men of intelligence?"

"Yes, I must say they were—for in spite of their lack of evidences of worldly prosperity, they were fine, stalwart fellows, with expressive faces and noble-looking heads."

"In fact I was taken with them instantly, in spite of the meanness of their shabby little offices and their lack of the other essentials."

"I was told that their clerk, a man named Merriden, could furnish me with the particulars of how that money went, embezzled from our firm by Turnour."

"You see Merriden was in the habit of visiting Turnour frequently, and as they went to places of amusement together and such like, Merriden was made a confidant of certain transactions of a financial nature, in which Turnour was engaged, in Wall and Broad Streets."

"He discovered, too, that this so-called reputable banker, Darnley, had got the greater part of the money, which Turnour had defrauded the company of."



"And, by the way, let me mention here that the defalcations will amount to nearer twenty thousand dollars than the ten which we first supposed.

"There was a letter, too, shown me, which had been found in Turnour's room, which placed beyond doubt the nature of his transactions with Darnley."

## CHAPTER VII.

As Morrel spoke there came a knock at the door of the office, and on that gentleman opening it, there entered a powerfully-built man of handsome presence, but indifferently clad.

It proved to be Mr. Ratchell, the private detective from Twenty-ninth Street and Broadway.

The moment Robert Pinkerton clapped eyes on the man he recognized him.

"I think I have met you before, Mr. Ratchell," said he, rather cynically.

Ratchell was not taken aback in the least.

"Yes, Mr. Pinkerton," was his cool reply, "and under peculiar circumstances."

"Yes, sir, under very peculiar circumstances," Pinkerton interjected coolly.

"If I recollect aright, the occasion was in Milwaukee."

"Yes, in Milwaukee—at the railway station, when in your zeal, and laboring under some inexplicable mistake, you endeavored to arrest me."

"That, I believe, was six years ago."

"Quite correct, six years ago next month."

"But, if I mistake not, you went under another name on that occasion."

"At least, it was not Ratchell," said Pinkerton sternly.

"No, sir; it was then Turnbull."

"You took me at the time for an escaped convict from Joliet, who had been undergoing a sentence of ten years for burglary when he effected his escape."

"Subsequently you discovered that I was not this escaped convict, but a discharged keeper against whom charges of neglect of duty were brought and not proved. These charges, Mr. Pinkerton, were false, and the result of the machinations of enemies—men who feared that I would expose them for their dishonesty, and which I could have done had I been allowed and given the time."

"But my enemies had influence enough to have me sent from Joliet in disgrace, hence my change of name from Turnbull to Ratchell."

"And with this explanation I have done."

"I perceive I have been deceived, sir," said Pinkerton, regarding the man now in a different light.

"In what respect, Mr. Pinkerton?"

Ratchell, or Turnbull, spoke in the same quiet tones he had used all along.

"I had been deceived in accounts that were given of you."

"Yes, no doubt of that."

"But you are not the only one."

"Your brother and others belonging to your Chicago agency were deceived also."

"But I shall live and succeed in spite of the hard things that have been said of me."

Pinkerton was already sorry for what he had said.

No doubt this man had been wronged.

And it was little wonder he had changed his name, under the circumstances.

Mr. Morrell had listened to all this with surprise.

But he offered no remark, and permitted them to talk on.

"I came here to see Mr. Morrell," said Ratchell; "and if that gentleman will give me an audience for a few minutes, I will convince him that my errand here is not without a purpose that may be of some benefit to his company."

"I am sure he has discovered the whereabouts of our defaulting clerk," the manager said in an aside to Pinkerton.

"It may be as you say," said Robert.

"Give him his audience."

"I am going now, so I'll not be in the way."

"No, that won't do," put in Morrell.

"You are on this case, sir—"

"I waive my right," said Pinkerton, rising.

"I have too much already to see to."

"But should you discover anything more about Darnley please let me know."

"I shall not fail to do so," was Morrell's reply.

Ratchell watched Pinkerton curiously until the detective got to the office door; then he said:

"Perhaps Mr. Pinkerton would like to remain?"

"No, not to-day, Mr. Ratchell," said Bob, turning away with a laugh.

"The case I find is in good hands, and as time is valuable I will bid you good day."

Then Morrell whispered something in Pinkerton's ear, and the latter left the office with a smile on his lips.

It was a smile so full of meaning that Ratchell could not help commenting on it.

Pinkerton now made his way back to Exchange Place.

The first man he met ascending the stairs to his agency was Murtagh.

"Glad you have turned up, for I have some news for you," was Bob's greeting.

"Indeed!"

"In regard to whom?"

"Darnley the banker."

"Have you seen him?"

"No; I have heard of him, though, and what I have heard has not been to his credit."

"But come along and I will open your eyes as to the man's character."

"Anything about Masson?" Murtagh questioned.

"Nothing."

"Have you come across him?"

"Yes."

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Murtagh and Pinkerton got seated in the latter's private office, the Irishman said:

"Do you know that Miss Gunnison is right with regard to Masson?"

"I think I misjudged the woman's character."

"Yes; I've no doubt but you did," said Bob.

"I, myself, think that Miss Gunnison is a very remarkable young lady."

"But her uncle is an infernal rascal. Now just you listen to what I have to say about Darnley."

"Go on."

"I think I know something about him myself," said Larry, as he pictured the two men as they sat in the restaurant at the corner of William Street and Maiden Lane.

Then Bob entered into a description of his interview with Morrell.

Murtagh could not avoid expressing surprise.

"This is astonishing!" he exclaimed. "It is rather a big drop from twenty million dollars to twenty thousand. But does Morrell really go by what he knows to be a fact?"

"I don't see that he would have any object in lying about the matter."

"Probably not. But it's surprising nobody discovered this before."

"Very surprising," said Bob.

"Especially among financiers," chimed in Murtagh.

"One would think they would be the first to discover the fraud that this man has been practicing for years."

"But many a man is supposed to be good till he is found out."

"That is a fact."

"And so this Darnley has been a regular swindler from the first—that is, according to Mr. Morrell's account—which I have no reason to doubt."

"Well, it's no wonder he is in with such a rascal as Masson."

"There is not the slightest doubt now as to whom they are conspiring against."

"It is Mr. Langley, and if not stopped in time his life may pay the forfeit."

"Oh, I'll put an end to their conspiracy. You need have no fear on that head," said Murtagh.

"These fellows' every move is watched. I've already seen to that."

Then the Irishman described what he had done in having Masson and the banker followed.

Soon after Murtagh took his leave and went up Wall Street to Nassau.

It was not far off the hour he had to meet Tom Doolan, the newsboy.

It was ten minutes of six when Murtagh entered his office.

The newsboy was already there.

"Well," said Murtagh, "how did yod succeed?"

"First-class."



"I followed 'em from the restaurant to Wall Street.  
 "Masson has an office there, as you know.  
 "Well, both of 'em went upstairs to the office with me at their heels.  
 "I took good care they didn't see me, or there might be the very mischief to play.  
 "When they got into the office I looked about to see that the coast was clear so as I'd have no trouble.  
 "Then I put my eye to the keyhole and peeked in.  
 "There they were, seated at a table with a bottle of 'fiz' before 'em and a box of cigars.  
 "Well, they drank first, and, lighting their cigars, they began to chin.  
 "As I couldn't listen with my eyes, I bent down and put my ear to the keyhole, just to find out what they were saying like."  
 "And you heard something important?"  
 "You can bet your sweet life, Mr. Murtagh, I did."  
 "Well, what did you hear?"  
 "Enough to convince me that two greater rascals never lived than Masson and Darnley.  
 "That Darnley," added the boy, "is a caution to snakes.  
 "He's not the man people think him, anyhow."  
 "What do you mean?"—from Murtagh.  
 "People say he's a millionaire, don't they? He's not, nor the first side of a millionaire.  
 "He's worth nothing, and is out for the dust worse than any swindler you ever knew."  
 "What did he say?"  
 "It would be more correct to ask what he did not say.  
 "He said everything that's bad—among the rest something about a young lady he called Miss Gunnison."  
 "Hah!" Murtagh exclaimed. "He mentioned her name, eh?"  
 "You'd better bet he did, sir, and the name of Mr. Langley, too.  
 "It appears Miss Gunnison is supposed to be his niece, and she is worth a whole pile of money—so Darnley said—about five hundred thousand dollars."  
 "Had Masson anything to say?"  
 "Yes, he had more chin than the other, and he wants to get all this boodle by marrying Miss Gunnison, then divy up with the old bloke, Darnley.  
 "Oh, they're two precious hangbirds, they are, and don't you forget it.  
 "They know their little book, if anybody does.  
 "Well, Mr. Langley was to be got out of the way in some manner, as he was courting the girl, too, and neither of 'em liked it, so that the programme is to get rid of him in some way."  
 "And they did not mention the manner in which they were to thus rid themselves?"  
 "No, sir, they did not," the boy answered.  
 "But from what I could made out, they won't stop short even at murder.  
 "Rid themselves of him they will, even if they have to take his life.  
 "I should like to warn that Langley, for he's not a bad sort, and has been very kind to me at various times."  
 "Well, what more did you find out?"  
 "Nothing more, Mr. Murtagh."  
 "Did you follow them from the Wall Street office?"  
 "No, I did not, for the reason that they didn't leave there, and as it was getting on to the time to call and keep my appointment with you, I concluded to cut out and not keep you waiting."  
 "You did well," said the detective.  
 "Now, Tom," added he, "don't forget that twenty-dollar bill.  
 "When you have completed your work that twenty dollars is yours, and five more to the back of it.  
 "Do you understand that, my lad?"  
 "Yes, sir.  
 "But what further do you want me to do?"  
 "Go back and keep further watch on those men.  
 "They are still no doubt in the Wall Street office, and you can wait until they leave and follow them."  
 "Very good, Mr. Murtagh.  
 "Then I am off, sir."  
 "Hold on a moment," said the detective.  
 "This cannot be done without money, as they may leave the city, and that will induce expense.  
 "Here is a V for you."  
 And Murtagh handed the sharp-featured lad a crisp five-dollar bill.  
 "Do you think you can get on with that much?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; sufficient to meet every want, even though I have to follow them out of the state.  
 "I suppose I am to see you here again, Mr. Murtagh, but when?"  
 "To-morrow at ten."  
 "Very good, sir, I shall be here sharp."  
 Tom Doolan now left the office and got into the street. It did not take him but a few minutes to reach Wall Street.  
 It was now dark.  
 The night was growing cold.  
 But this did not bother the warm-blooded Tom much.  
 He was used to running around the streets of New York in all sorts of weather, and like most of his class was as hardy a specimen of the street gamin as one could wish to see.  
 When in line with the great building in which Masson had his office he took a survey of the windows.  
 One was lighted.  
 It was on the third story.  
 Tom, from the light in the window, concluded that Masson and Darnley were still in the former's office.  
 But to make sure he crossed the street and passed into the building.  
 Then up the three flights of stairs went the boy.  
 Reaching the corridor on the third flight, he stole with noiseless step to the door of the room in which the banker and his friend were.  
 He heard a hum of voices.  
 It seemed to him as if there were more than two men now in the room.  
 He presently convinced himself that this was so by bending down to the door and peeping in at the keyhole.  
 Yes, Masson and Darnley had a companion; a coarse, strong-featured man, who might be about forty years of age.  
 This man had a pronouncedly sinister visage, black eyes, shaggy brows, a beard and mustache.  
 His skin was as bronzed as an Indian's.  
 Tom thought he was either a Spaniard or an Italian.  
 He was flashily dressed.  
 A heavy gold watch chain dangled from his vest, while his thick, coarse fingers were covered with much more jewelry than was in good taste.  
 And what was still more evident to Doolan was the fact that the stranger was a sporting man; a retired prize-fighter, probably, who was also a bookmaker at the race-tracks.  
 The fellow was too loudly dressed to be a business man, and his jewelry too flashy to be a broker.  
 Having taken an inventory of the office as far as the three men were concerned, Tom settled down now to hear what they had to say.  
 He naturally thought there would be some rich developments as to what the plotters were about, and that these developments would be of more than passing interest to Murtagh.  
 The lad's ear was soon in line with the keyhole.  
 And not a word passed in the room which he did not hear.  
 For almost a minute a dead silence was maintained by the three men, then Darnley, who was the first to speak, said:  
 "Those letters will work things nicely.  
 "The one you have got, Masson, will save you at least from suspicion, should anything of an unpleasant character occur.  
 "Both are forgeries, of course—done by my friend, who is the most expert penman in this country.  
 "He does not know for what object, nor did I take the trouble to enlighten him, it being none of his business, nor did he seek to find out.  
 "He was well paid for his work, and this was all he looked for."  
 "And enough, too," growled Masson.  
 "It would be a nice kettle of fish if we told every Tom, Dick and Harry of our affairs."  
 "You may wager your pile on that," interjected the dark man, laughing harshly.  
 "I reckon Mr. Langley can be disposed of in short order, and if the scheme is not as successful as we could wish, why, there is Bill Ballingdale to come in; and if he don't fix matters, the deuce will be in it."  
 "But can the other chap be depended on?" questioned Masson.  
 "Certainly," replied Darnley.  
 "But why ask?"  
 "For the simple reason I don't relish his colorless face."



"I never knew a man to have such a phiz who wasn't a squealer."

"No man can help his face," growled Ballingdale, "no more than you can help yours or I mine."

"I had a pretty handsome mug once, and was looked on as a likely sort o' chap by the gals."

"But then came a stiff half a dozen battles in the ring (and pretty hard ones at that) which knocked all the beauty out of me."

"And they say now as I'm ugly enough to break a glass, if I was ever so vain as to look at myself in one, which I'm not foolish enough to do."

"But can I help my looks?"

"Not by a darned sight!"

"Beauty is only skin deep at best."

"I once knew a mighty handsome chap—with a face as clear and wholesome as an infant's."

"He was proud of it, too."

"What was the result?"

"He went down to New Orleans, and was one o' the almighty mashers in that city, going to splice with a woman worth a million, too, when on comes Yaller Jack, folered close by smallpox, and if you'd see that cove when they'd got through with him, you wouldn't give tuppence for him in a hundred years."

"He got to be the ugliest-looking cuss you ever saw—and what well-nigh broke him in small pieces was the fact that the rich woman went back on him—wouldn't as much as look at the poor cuss, as he passed by."

"What do you gentlemen think of that?"

"It certainly was not his fault; it was fate, vanity, Yaller Jack and smallpox as did for him."

"Ballingdale, you are too long-winded by half," exclaimed Darnley.

"You must remember we're not here to listen to a lecture on good looks."

"No, sir; we're here for a different purpose," broke in Masson in a disgruntled tone.

"If the man can be trusted, to whom I allude, so much the better."

"But with the best intentions in the world, he may fail, too, and then whom have we to fall back on?"

"Me, of course," interjected Bill Ballingdale.

"I'm in this affair for money, and I ain't become a new-fledged captain of a schooner for nothing."

"See here, Masson, if you don't settle the bloke, and the other chap fails, too—why, I can arrange the whole proceedin' without a brake."

"See the point?"

"That's all right," said Darnley.

"If all else fails, your plan, Ballingdale, is a sure one."

"But you must drop the gentleman somewhere on your voyage."

"Not on an island, you may be sure," laughed Ballingdale.

"I ain't the chap to take such risks."

"He shall find a place like my late respected friend, McGinty, at the bottom of the sea."

"You're a nice, cheerful lot of gentlemen, you are," concluded the listening boy.

"You mean murder, if anything, and yet I should like to know where this meeting is to take place, as well as a little further about those forged letters, and how they're going to develop."

"Langley is in for it, a dollar to doughnuts."

"Have these precious rascals any more to say, I should like to know?"

"It seems not!"

"They haven't half finished their story, it appears to me, and they have left me in doubt about many things I should like to know."

"Not another word, eh?"

"Well, it seems not."

Tom, though he waited and listened ten minutes longer, heard nothing further to enlighten him on the subject.

He grew tired of waiting at last.

Besides, he was aware that he was running considerable risk in staying in the position in which he was, for if caught by the trio of rascals, he would no doubt pay with his life for his sense of duty and obligation to the Irishman.

Tom now stole down the passage to the stairway, and a few moments later was in the shadow of the buildings on the opposite side of the street.

And here he waited and watched the lighted window of the third story, in which was situated Tom Masson's office.

He did not know how long the three conspirators would stay in that room.

But he was determined to remain at his post, if it took him all night, until they came down into the street.

Tom Doolan was not a little mystified at what he had listened to so surreptitiously.

He gleaned the fact that murder was intended, and the man who was to be the victim.

But as to the rest, the whole matter was as a sealed book.

Leaving Tom Dolan at his post, we may now follow Larry Murtagh.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE reader will recollect the note which had been left at the office of the Irishman by Mike Mallon, alias Jimmy the Ped.

It called for the detective to meet Mallon at the Nag's Head, Sixth Avenue, at seven o'clock sharp.

Murtagh left his office at half an hour after six.

This he considered would give him time to meet the crook's appointment, made in the letter.

He had had dealings with Jimmy the Ped for many years, and he knew well he could rely on what the man said.

Mallon had given him valuable information on many occasions, which served Murtagh in good stead, when it was clear very often that he would have to give up a case for lack of proper clews.

This man Mallon was simply known at police headquarters as one of the most ingenious pickpockets the country had ever seen.

He had been arrested on suspicion on numerous occasions.

But the authorities never managed to secure a conviction against him.

On one of these occasions Larry Murtagh had saved him from a protracted term of imprisonment, and this act of the Irishman's Mallon never forgot.

Mallon, had he so desired, could have been one of the principal stool pigeons at police headquarters.

But, crook as he was, this was not the man's character.

For a thief, too, he was singularly truthful, and Murtagh always regarded him as a man on whose word he could depend at any time.

At seven o'clock to the minute Larry entered the Nag's Head.

This hostelry was by no means a thieves' resort, and though occasionally a sport could be seen within its portals, and perhaps some well-known crook, it was singularly free from this class of custom.

Besides, it was one of Gotham's old chop houses, cut out after the English pattern, where one could get a first-class meal at a moderate price, and as good a drop of liquor as at any place in New York.

When Murtagh got into the Nag's Head, he found Mallon calmly awaiting him.

Mike Mallon, or Jimmy the Ped, as he was the more frequently called, was as queer a little man as you would meet with in a day's walk.

In height less than five feet, deeply pitted with pockmarks, a queer little face on which not a hair grew, and a perfectly bald head, that shone like a billiard ball.

He could not have been less than forty years of age, and he might have been nearer fifty.

His eyes were widely separated, large, round, and of the deepest blue.

But his mouth, which was beautifully formed, was his most pleasing feature, and his teeth were as white and even as a woman's.

With this description, which we think necessary, we may now proceed.

"I got here a few minutes ahead of you," said Mike Mallon.

"Indeed, I was not sure that you would get the note I left for you."

"Why not?" asked Larry, as he took a seat at a small square table opposite the crook.

"Whatever is left for me with Mr. Blanchard, I get it the moment I make my appearance at the office."

"I am aware of that."

"But I thought you might be out of town, and then, of course, you would not get the note until it would be too late."

"However, I am glad you *did* get it, and that you are here."

"You said in your note that your information was important?" said Murtagh.



"Yes, and so it is," replied Mallon.

"What is its nature?"

"Have a cigar with me, and I will tell you."

The cigars were called for, and the two men, lighting up, Jimmy the Ped went on as follows:

"I don't know whether you know a man named Bill Ballingdale?" he began.

"No.

"What is he?"

"A retired prize fighter, but at present a bookmaker who follows the races.

"This is the man of whom I am going to speak, principally.

"But there are two others," continued Mallon, "whom you doubtless know?"

Murtagh nodded for the crook to go on.

"Darnley, the Broadway banker, and a broker named Masson.

"These three men are implicated in a plot to do away with a man named Langley, who had been a former partner of Masson's."

Murtagh listened to the foregoing with no little interest.

He was far from suspecting that this was the kind of information Mallon had for him.

He was surely now on the eve of hearing something which would greatly simplify the case handed over to him by Robert Pinkerton, at the instigation of Miss Gunnison.

"This is indeed information of some value," he said to Mallon, "and the more you can enlighten me on certain points connected with these men the greater I shall be indebted to you."

"And so you do already know something about the case?" said the Ped.

"Yes.

"I know in part that those men are plotting against Langley, because he is in the way of Tom Masson's interest with regard to a young woman named Gunnison."

"Exactly so.

"Miss Gunnison happens to be the bone of contention, and all because she favors the advances of Mr. Langley, who, by the way, is her accepted lover, though much against the grain of her banker uncle.

"Now I shall tell you how I found this out.

"On West Street is a small saloon called the Ram, kept by an old-time friend of mine named Edmund Harrigan, on whom I happened to call last night to borrow a trifle less than a hundred dollars for a certain purpose which it will be unnecessary to mention.

"When I called at the Ram my friend Edmund happened to be over in Jersey City, and as I was told by the barkeeper that he would be back in less than half an hour I resolved to wait, and for this purpose went into the large room, which is occasionally used as a meeting place for a club of longshoremen.

"I got the barkeeper to bring me in a hot whiskey.

"The room was very dark, entirely absent, as a matter of fact, of customers, and the man who brought my order wanted to light some of the gas-jets.

"I said no, that this would only be an unnecessary expense, and that as I had something to think over I would much prefer the room as it was; that I could do my thinking much better as the place then was.

"He made no objection to this, and leaving me to my cogitations returned to the bar, where he had two or three longshoremen to attend to.

"Now I don't know whether you were ever in the Ram, Mr. Murtagh, but in order to make my account clearer to you I must tell you that at one corner of this big meeting room is another—an absolutely private one—in which my friend Edmund occasionally entertains a few choice friends.

"Up to the time I entered the main, or meeting room, this place was empty.

"While deep in my reflections in a dark corner where I could not be seen, three men entered the main room—that is where I was myself—and were shown into the private office to which I have alluded already.

"These men were not aware that any one was near, doubtless, or they certainly would have been more careful of how they expressed themselves.

"After having been shown into the office the barkeeper lit the gas, subsequently returning with a bottle of wine and some cigars, which one of the men had ordered.

"After that he went away.

"Up to this time I didn't know who the men were, as I could not very well recognize them as a result of the darkness of the place.

"But the rather loud tones of one of the men soon arrested my attention.

"He had not spoken half a dozen words when I recognized him."

"It was this man Ballingdale, to whom you alluded, was it not?" said Murtagh.

"Yes—Bill Ballingdale, the retired pugilist and all round sport.

"As I said before, Ballingdale's words arrested my attention.

"I knew the man to be one of the most unscrupulous rascals the United States ever saw—a man who would not scruple to hang his own father for what he could make by it; and knowing this, I concluded that Mister Ballingdale and his two friends were up to something devilish, and that they needed watching.

"The man's next words convinced me that this was the case.

"So quietly arising from where I sat, I went noiselessly down between the long rows of tables, and drew up in a dark corner near the office.

"I knew that the barkeeper would not dare interfere with me, so I calmly awaited results."

Just as Mallon got to this point of his narrative a drunken bully who had been at the bar got into an altercation with one of the customers.

Then for a minute of two reigned pandemonium.

There was a war of words, followed by a shower of blows.

But the row was speedily quelled by the bartender coming out, taking a hand in and finally ejecting the bully.

After this quietness reigned once more.

## CHAPTER X.

"WELL, I suppose I can go on again, since that bully has been removed," said Mallon, who was considerably nettled with the interruption and the injustice of the bully attacking a peaceful customer of the place.

"It would appear," pursued he, "that the quietest place in the world is subjected to the most common drunken loafer coming in and raising Cain.

"I could never understand why such fellows are tolerated.

"They are blackguardly, boisterous, and as full of fight as an egg is full of meat, till they run up against the wrong parties, and then they are as craven cowards as one can meet.

"If they find a man weaker than themselves they invariably try to bulldoze him.

"I don't think the fact of a man drinking should save him in such a case.

"Such people should be handled without gloves from the outset.

"But this has nothing to do with my story.

"So I shall go on.

"As I got nicely seated," pursued Mallon, "I heard Ballingdale say:

"Now, Mr. Darnley, the question is how much money will there be in this thing for me, or whether it is worth taking the risk and embarking in it.

"I have a schooner, as pretty a little craft as there is on the Sound.

"It's a good sailer, and will serve your purpose to a hair.

"But I must know exactly where I stand, for it is but natural to expect that people should be paid for their labor."

"That's so," chimed in the man whom he addressed as Darnley; "and I know you long enough to be aware of the fact that you will do nothing for nothing."

"At this, Ballingdale and the other man—who, by the way, up to this time had not spoken, laughed heartily.

"The third man I discovered presently to be Masson, the broker and former partner of Mr. Langley.

"He put in his oar, too, and had considerable to say about Ballingdale's schooner, and the price that should be paid for hiring it, and about many other things that were more the banker's business than his.

"But, bless you," proceeded Mallon, "it is hard to stop such people's mouths, and when they once get going you might as well shut up shop and get out.

"Well, it is hardly necessary to detail all their conversation.

"The substance of it was all about a young woman who



is worth five hundred thousand dollars in her own right, and who is supposed to be a niece of this man Darnley, who has the reputation of being a great millionaire, and who isn't, as I soon found out.

"In fact, the supposed great banker is as big a swindler as the person of his choice for the affections and fortune of Miss Gunnison, Mr. Tom Masson, with whom you are doubtless acquainted."

"I have good reason to be," Murtagh bitterly interrupted, "seeing that the scoundrel swindled me out of ten thousand dollars, money honestly earned, if ever money was earned."

"Yes, Mike, I have a little account to settle with that gentleman, and I think I am on the high road to pay him off in full."

"But proceed, and pardon the interruption."

"No interruption at all, Mr. Murtagh," rejoined the Ped.

"It is only natural you should give vent to your feelings where such a chap is concerned."

"Well, it appears that this precious uncle of Miss Gunnison's is no more a millionaire than I am, but on the contrary, a downright swindler—in league with such men as Masson to get the better of any unwary poor devil they may get into their drag-net."

"Why, would you believe it, sir, the man who has been posing as a multi-millionaire all those years is not worth twenty thousand dollars all told."

"It is certainly hard to credit," said Larry.

"Nevertheless it's a fact," replied Mallon.

"During the talk between these three men—none of which was very edifying—Masson said that his friend Darnley could not rake up more than twenty thousand dollars to save his soul from perdition, and that if Langley was not got rid of, and the girl's hand and fortune obtained by Masson, that irretrievable ruin stared them in the face, and that nothing in the world would keep them out of prison."

"Masson talked very plain about a matter of that kind," said Murtagh thoughtfully.

"Indeed he did, and very impudently, too, especially in the presence of such a man as Ballingdale."

"However," continued the Ped, "the facts are these: Darnley is little better than a beggar—that is, for a man reputed to be so highly respectable and wealthy—and that Masson is not in a much better position, and that between them they are conspiring to get that girl's fortune of half a million into their hands, and that to accomplish this they must first get rid of her suitor and accepted lover, Langley."

"They did not go so far as to say that they meant murdering him."

"Their language was not quite so plain as that, as it was more or less covert and hidden."

"But there was no mistaking the tenor of what was meant, and if they fail in getting rid of Langley in one way, they will succeed in another—through the agency of Bill Ballingdale, who hinted that his schooner was prepared to take a voyage at any moment, and nothing would please him more than to have Mr. Langley a passenger—provided always that the cash was forthcoming for his services."

"I would like to bet a dollar to a cent," said Mike, "that if Ballingdale got Mr. Langley into his *tender* clutches that that would be the last of Mr. Langley."

"Did these rascals speak about any letters?" questioned Murtagh, as he recalled Miss Gunnison's allusion at the Pinkerton Detective Agency.

"Yes, I think, now you mention it, that they did refer to a letter which was to be sent to Langley."

"But at they were continuing to dilate on this and other subjects, my friend Edmund returned from Jersey City, and as the barkeeper came in hunting for me, I concluded it wise to get into the barroom and transact the little business I had with him."

"When that was accomplished, to my satisfaction, the man Ballingdale and his companions left the office, came to the bar and had just one drink, then went away."

"They had barely left when I followed them out."

"But I might as well have searched for a needle in a haystack."

"They had disappeared."

## CHAPTER XI.

MURTAGH, when he left Mallon, which he did shortly after the latter's account given in the preceding chapter, did not quite know what he had best do now.

He had, earlier in the day (which we have omitted to

state to the reader), made certain inquiries in regard to the whereabouts of Mr. Langley.

But his inquiries in this direction were of no avail.

The broker could not be found.

Nor could his place of residence be even located.

He had been living on West Twenty-third street.

But for some reason, not given, he had left there about a week, not explaining where he was going.

The man must be seen and warned, if possible.

Surely Miss Gunnison would be the best person to call on for this purpose.

She, if any one, must know where he was.

As there was no time to be lost, Murtagh set out for Mr. Darnley's residence, on Fifth Avenue.

This house was in reality not his, but hers, as the Irishman subsequently discovered.

So off Murtagh posted to the Fifth Avenue house.

It was a brownstone front; one of the old-fashioned style of mansions, which are fast being superseded by more modern buildings, not alone on Fifth Avenue, but throughout every fashionable part of the city.

It did not take Murtagh long to get to the Darnley mansion.

But here a disappointment awaited him.

Miss Gunnison was from home.

Did the servant know where the lady was to be found?

No, the servant knew absolutely nothing of her whereabouts, excepting that she had left that morning and had not returned.

This settled it.

Murtagh bethought him now of another place to inquire.

A noted hostelry, of which men in Langley's line were frequent *habitues*.

He at once got into Sixth Avenue and boarded a downtown car.

This took him as far as the house of entertainment alluded to.

Here he found quite a number of Wall Street speculators, all acquainted with the man whom he was seeking.

But not one appeared to be able to tell him where he could find Mr. Langley.

This was disappointment number two.

Murtagh resolved not to give up his search, however.

There were other places where brokers dropped in occasionally.

Engle's was one—off Broadway—Twenty-ninth Street, we believe.

"Well, I guess I'll chance Engle's," said Murtagh.

So back uptown he went, not riding this time, but walking.

"If it turns out a frost now I'll give it up," thought the Irishman.

So leaving Broadway, in he went to Engle's, one of the most popular beer saloons in New York.

This hostelry is frequented by actors, as well as brokers and journalists.

Here he at last found a young Wall Street man who was not only intimately acquainted with Langley, but who knew his present address.

"I guess if you hurry up you will find him at — Lexington Avenue."

"I saw him last night."

"What is his object in not giving his address to others? Ah, you must ask him that yourself, dear boy—not knowing, can't say."

"But Langley was never much at giving his address to anybody."

"In fact, my friend, Langley is a very reserved man, don't you see, and that, I suppose, accounts for it."

"No doubt at all about it," said Murtagh.

And thanking the young man he went off to — Lexington Avenue.

He found the house easy enough, but—another disappointment—he didn't find the man.

"Guess I'll have to give this hunting-up of an elusive individual as a bad job," said Larry; and once more he went back to Engle's.

The same crowd was there as when he had left—the young Wall Street man with the rest.

The latter, as soon as Murtagh entered, saw him and came forward.

"Well, what luck?" said he.

"No luck at all," replied the Irishman disconsolately.

"Well, I'm deuced sorry for that. It's very annoying, to be sure."

"Could the people in the house give you any information about him?"



"None whatever," Murtagh answered.  
 "It appears that he hasn't been home since morning, when he went downtown to his office."  
 "But he hasn't been even to his office, for I had inquiries made there myself."

"Confounded ill luck!" the young broker exclaimed.  
 "Might I ask if you are after him for anything particular?"

"Has he been up to anything that will land him in any trouble?"

"No; quite the contrary."

"I'm deuced glad of that," replied the young man.

"But is your business with my friend relating to bonds or anything of that sort?"

"No, it is not."

"But it is of so important a character that I must see him for his own good."

"It is essential that I shall see him to serve him, and the sooner I see him the better it will be for himself."

"In that case," replied the young man, much relieved to find that his friend had not got into any trouble, "I think I can take you to the very place where he is—that is, where he is to be found."

"Where is that?"

"Jersey City."

"Where there?"

"Taylor's Hotel."

"And you are sure that he is there?"

"Absolutely sure."

"I thought you might have found him at — Lexington Avenue; and to tell you truth, my dear fellow, I thought Langley had got into some sort of trouble, as you were so persistent in your inquiries, and you know it wouldn't be right, dear boy, to put you on the track till one was sure it was all right."

"I understand all that," interjected Murtagh, "and don't blame you."

"If you thought your friend was in trouble it would be your duty to screen and save him."

"Are you ready to take the trip to Jersey City?"

"At once, my dear fellow."

"And you are sure we'll find Mr. Langley at Taylor's Hotel?"

"Not a doubt of it, Mr. Murtagh."

"Come, are you ready?"

"Yes."

"We'll take a cab."

"Yes, I think that will be the best plan."

The young broker sent one of Engel's waiters in search of a carriage.

The man soon returned with a four-wheeler.

The broker instructed the Jehu where to go, and soon the two men were bowling along to one of the Jersey City ferries.

Without leaving the vehicle they crossed the ferry.

Taylor's Hotel was reached.

Murtagh and the broker alighted, and entered the bar.

But here was to be another disappointment which out-Heroded Herod.

Mr. Langley had already left for New York.

He was not more than fifteen minutes gone, and the ferryboats which contained the friends must have passed each other in midstream.

"Well, of all the abominable luck, this is the worst," came from the Irishman.

"Had we been a quarter of an hour sooner we'd have caught him!"

"Yes, I declare it is very provoking," said Langley's friend.

"But we are not going to be beaten in this way, either."

"Let's return to New York at once, and if we don't collar him then, I'm a Dutchman!"

There was no more to be done and said, so far as Jersey City was concerned, and they once more entered their conveyance and recrossed the ferry to New York.

By this time the night had grown bitter cold, and every cloud in the sky betokened a storm.

The same luck attended Murtagh's efforts in New York once more.

He and the broker searched for Langley in vain.

## CHAPTER XII.

WE may now return to the boy, Tom Doolan.

It was on the point of striking nine, when Tom saw the light extinguished in the third-story window, of the Wall Street office.

"That settles it," muttered the lad.

"I reckon my watching of that window is done for the night, and, by jingo, it's about time, for I'm almost froze waiting."

Tom soon saw the three men emerge into the street.

They stood talking for some moments on the sidewalk.

Then Ballingdale took his departure, and walked quickly in the direction of Broadway.

Tom did not take as much interest in Ballingdale as in the other two, and these two he was not going to miss, if he could help it.

"I hope they don't separate, and go different ways," he said to himself, "for, if they do, it will be impossible for me to follow both."

To the boy's disgust that was just the very thing they did.

They waited till Ballingdale had vanished in the gloom, then, with a few whispered words, the character of which Tom could not possibly hear, Masson followed in the same direction as taken by Ballingdale.

"As I cannot follow both, I'll just keep tabs on that rascally banker," Tom muttered, "and if he gives me the slip, I'm a fool and a hunkhead that's all."

Masson, instead of keeping on up Wall Street to Broadway, turned down Nassau Street.

Until Masson had turned the corner, Darnley stood as still as a statue.

The moment he vanished, however, the banker passed down Wall Street, as if he were going to the ferry.

"Hum," thought the lad, "that chap is bound for Brooklyn, sure, and I'll keep track of him till I land him."

"I fancy Mr. Murtagh is more interested in the banker than he would be in the other two."

"However, I'll chance it and light out after him."

"By gum! how precious cold it's got to be!"

"But I'll soon heat up on the ferryboat."

But Tom discovered presently that he had made somewhat of a mistake in his calculations.

Instead of Darnley going to the ferry as he imagined, the banker turned down William Street.

"Bound for some drinking place, no doubt," reflected the boy disappointedly.

"But wherever he goes, I'm bound not to lose sight of him—if he went to— Well, I'll not say where, as that would not be nice for a Sunday school scholar like me."

Tom at once turned the corner into William Street.

The banker did not go far along William Street, when he stopped and looked about him.

Did he suspect he was being followed?

This Tom was not so sure of.

Darnley was acting strangely, no doubt.

But before the man could look back Tom was hidden away in the deep shadows of some tall buildings, and there he waited for the banker to go on again.

He had not more than a minute or so to wait, when Darnley turned on his heel and continued his way, which, as it happened, was no farther than Schultzenland's restaurant.

"As I thought," Tom muttered.

"The old duffer is on for more booze."

"Well, good luck to him; it may give me a chance to warm up a little."

Meanwhile, the banker had passed into the saloon, and the boy hastened up to one of the windows and looked in.

He now saw that Darnley had another object in his mind than "booze," as he termed it, in going into the saloon.

It was doubtless to meet an appointment, for the banker had gone up at once to one of the tables where sat a slight, sinister-looking man, with a face which was entirely colorless.

Tom then recalled to mind what he had heard outside of Tom Masson's office door while listening at the keyhole.

"I am glad now I didn't follow Masson," he reflected.

"The man with the dead face is much more interesting than the ex-bucket-shop keeper."

"I will keep that gentleman and Darnley in sight, and it may give a clew to what Mr. Murtagh wants to find out."

"This is the fellow who forged those letters that I'd like to know more about, and, no doubt, so would the detective."

Mr. Darnley had already sat down at the table with the sinister-visaged stranger, and for some time they conversed in low tones—little above a whisper, Tom thought, as he watched them intently—and, no doubt, the boy was right in this supposition, though he could not possibly have heard them from where he was had they spoken in a more than usually loud tone.

Now, Tom would fain have gone into Schultzenland's, as



he was almost blue with the cold, had he not a keen sense of the duty with which he had been intrusted by Murtagh.

By entering the restaurant he would have destroyed his chances of following the two men up, and this would have ended his usefulness for that night, at least.

No, it was far better to suffer the hardship to which he was, and had been, exposed, than to run any such risk.

He would wait outside till the men had left the drinking place and follow them.

They would surely not wait very long there, not more than half an hour at the most, and if he could stand exposed three hours to the cold of this wintery night, he could stand the other half without a murmur.

Then there was a twenty-dollar bill in the balance.

And that was worth putting up with some discomfort to earn.

While Tom was reflecting thus, the two men arose from the table and left the saloon.

The boy got into a doorway in time to escape being observed.

The men, instead of going along William Street, turned into Maiden Lane.

Tom followed as usual, keeping well in the shadow of the buildings.

Darnley and his companion crossed Nassau Street, still keeping up Maiden Lane into Broadway.

"I see they are going to give me a run for my money," thought Tom.

"It's likely they'll take the Broadway cars and go uptown."

"Well, if that's their scheme it shall be mine, too."

"Where they go I go likewise."

"But it's getting colder than ever," the lad muttered, as he glanced up at the dun-colored sky.

"It's cold enough for snow," added the lad, "and if there ain't a big fall before morning, I'm no weather sharp."

Darnley and the sinister-faced man, instead of taking a Broadway car for the uptown district, hailed a passing hack.

Now for the first time Tom was at his wits' ends and in a genuine quandary, as he saw the two men spring into the conveyance.

The question which now arose in his mind was, how was he to follow them?

And while he was thus debating with himself, the sharp crack of the driver's whip smote the frosty air, and the carriage rolled up Broadway.

But Tom Doolan was not to be left in this way, either.

"I'll go with them, if it costs me a leg," the lad muttered through his set teeth, and away he ran, after the vehicle at the top of his speed.

He succeeded in overtaking the carriage before it reached Fulton Street, and with a lithe spring he swung himself on behind.

It was not the first time Tom Doolan had taken a surreptitious ride in this way, and he had no trouble in settling himself comfortably for a journey uptown.

Had the Jehu even seen him, it is not likely that he would have dislodged Tom from his precarious seat—and, though he had, the plucky lad would have been back again the moment the driver had turned his head.

In such a manner block after block was passed, until the vehicle had reached Twenty-third Street.

Then the carriage turned into Fifth Avenue.

Tom heard one of the great city clocks strike ten, and, though half frozen with the chilliness of the night, he held on bravely.

"The banker is driving to his house on Fifth Avenue," thought the boy.

But in this conjecture he was mistaken, as he presently discovered.

The vehicle was driven some distance up Fifth Avenue, when it made a sudden detour to the right, and a little later emerged into Madison Avenue.

Another mile passed, Tom clinging to his precarious seat like grim death, when the conveyance stopped suddenly.

It had entered one of the fashionable squares of New York.

"I had better get off here," thought the lad, and he did so.

He had no sooner got into the shadows of one of the brownstone fronts, when the Jehu sprang from his seat and opened the carriage door.

Next moment the two men had alighted.

Then the banker settled with the driver, and the vehicle drove off.

"Reckon that ends the chase," Tom reflected grimly;

"and I am not sorry for it, for, by jingo, I couldn't have held on five minutes longer."

"If I had I'd have been frozen stiff."

Indeed, the brave lad as it was was trembling like an aspen leaf.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE reader will recall the fact that we described this square in the initial chapter of the present narrative.

The reader will also recall the solitary street-lamp which we alluded to on the same occasion, and which witnessed the unexpected tragedy in the snowstorm.

When the carriage in which Darnley and his companion had come had been driven away, the two men stood for some time under this very street-lamp.

They were conversing very earnestly, not a word of which Tom could hear from his post of observation, and the boy would have given a good deal just then to learn what was being said.

But this was out of the question, and as he did not care to court discovery at this stage, he remained quietly where he was till the men passed on.

"I should like to know where they are going now," Tom muttered, as he stole out from the shadow of the brownstone front.

The banker and his companion did not go far, however. They stopped suddenly and looked back.

But the boy was expecting some such move, and got into cover as before.

Just in time, indeed, to escape being seen.

"Confound them, why don't they go on," said Tom.

The words had scarcely left his lips, when both men mounted the stoop of a brownstone front.

Tom saw the sinister-faced man bend over, and a moment later the door of the house was opened and Darnley and his companion passed in.

Then the door was sent to with a bang.

Tom now crossed the street, and in the shadow of some leafless trees glanced curiously up at the house.

All was darkness and silence.

The square, even at this hour, was ghostlike, which struck the half-frozen lad with the drear feeling of a graveyard.

Whichever way he looked he could not detect one solitary evidence of life—not even a light, save the feeble glare of the street-lamp to his left and on the opposite side of the way.

Tom saw that the house into which the two men had passed was one of the tallest in the square.

He counted the stories.

There were five.

All the rest in the square were three and four.

This fashionable square was very well known to Tom Doolan.

He had often passed through it in daylight when on his way downtown.

And it had impressed him as being one of the most beautiful in the city, especially in the summertime, when the park was in full bloom, and the fragrance of flowers and plants had such a delicious impression on his youthful fancy.

The reader must not think for an instant that young Doolan was an ordinary street Arab.

On the contrary, he had been brought up well, and had received an excellent education; that was before his parents had died.

They were well-to-do Harlem people, and from his mother Tom had inherited poetical tastes, which had made him an ardent lover of nature and the beautiful in all its aspects.

With a powerful imagination, it is little wonder that the boy experienced an indescribable feeling of awe creeping over him as he stood under the shadow of the leafless trees, beneath which he had taken shelter.

He still stood looking up at the house, and wondering how long Darnley and his companion would remain there.

While thus cogitating, a light shot out from one of the windows.

It proceeded from the third story.

This was at any rate a relief, and somewhat brightened the boy's feelings, which had been unaccountably depressed since he had entered the square.

Scarcely an instant elapsed after the first glimmer of the light, when Tom saw the banker and the sinister-faced man approach the window and look out into the square.

Tom could see that the banker's face was all aglow.



That he was excited over some object was evident, for he was gesticulating with both hands, and apparently talking rapidly.

Several times he pointed in the direction of the solitary street-lamp, as if to impress something on the sinister-faced man's mind.

The latter seemed listening quietly.

This was what struck Tom, for he couldn't see the fellow even move his lips.

And thus both men remained at the window for some time, the banker plainly impressing some important particular on his companion.

Then they disappeared from the window, and Tom saw no more of them.

While the boy still waited the reappearance of the two men he was watching, a sound from the direction of the street-lamp attracted his attention.

A look in that direction brought a startled exclamation from his lips.

He saw that a man stood under the street-lamp, and that he was gazing curiously about the square, and occasionally glancing at a notebook which he held in his hand.

Though this man was muffled almost to the eyes, there was something familiar in his appearance that imparted to the boy that he had seen him before.

For some time Tom watched him with the greatest interest and intensity.

Even the third-story window of the brownstone front was forgotten.

Where had he seen him?

Who was he?

What had brought him there at that hour?

Why was he so often referring to the notebook?

His actions looked to Tom for a moment like those of a lunatic, for the man was gesticulating in a wild, strange manner, which could not help but arrest any one's attention.

The boy still continued watching the man, and wondering who he was, and why his appearance was so strangely familiar.

And while he stood looking a sudden gust of wind blew the man's hat off.

This hat was a soft felt, with a broad brim, such as are often seen in Western states.

The man, making a dart to recover his hat, dropped his notebook.

Then Tom saw his face for the first time.

He had seen the man in Larry Murtagh's office on many occasions, and he knew at once it was the Irish detective's partner, Tom Blanchard.

No sooner had Doolan made this discovery than his heart beat wildly, for now he at least had some one to help him so far as the banker and sinister-faced man were concerned.

Without a moment's hesitation Doolan ran over to the detective and accosted him.

Blanchard appeared as surprised to see the boy as the latter was surprised to see him.

"Hello, what brings you here?" he asked.

"I was going to ask you the same question," replied Tom.

"For I never expected to see you here; and really to see you gesticulating I took you at first for a man who had just escaped from some lunatic asylum.

"But the moment your hat blew off I recognized you, and mighty glad I am of it, I can tell you."

Then the lad briefly explained why he was there, and the man he had followed at Mr. Murtagh's orders.

"Now the question," continued Doolan, "is, where are we to find Mr. Murtagh.

"Darnley and the other fellow—his name I don't know—are in that brownstone front yonder"—indicating the house—"and if Mr. Murtagh was here I'd know what to do further in the matter.

"As it is I'm just puzzled how to act."

"Do you mean to say that you rode all the way uptown such a night as this at the back of a four wheeler?" questioned Blanchard surprised.

"That's what I did," replied the lad, "and I had been on the watch on Wall Street three hours before that, and in the cold the whole time."

"By Jove, you're a wonder!" exclaimed Blanchard.

"I didn't imagine there was a boy in this country who'd have done that.

"You must be perished with the cold, my brave boy?"

"Well, I was half frozen, and that's a fact," Tom answered.

"If that carriage had gone much farther I'd have dropped sure.

"But then," added he cheerfully, "I'm used to being out in all sorts of weather, and I don't mind a little hardship and starvation occasionally.

"Besides, you see, Mr. Murtagh has promised me twenty dollars, if I do my work well and faithfully."

"You're a queer boy," said Blanchard, musingly.

"You've a very old head on a young pair of shoulders. You'll make your mark some day," added he.

"Why do you think so?"

Tom was plainly pleased at this view of his character.

"Why? Because I never heard a boy of your years speak as you do.

"You might have passed through college, and not speak half as well."

"Thank you for that, Mr. Blanchard," gratefully from Doolan.

"And one day you may have cause to remember your words to a poor, struggling boy, who, if he has nothing else, has a keen sense of duty.

"But, Mr. Blanchard, please tell me what am I to do next?

"If necessary, I'll remain here all night, and watch the house."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

TOM BLANCHARD looked at Doolan for a moment without answering.

The boy's grit was a revelation to him.

"Why, my boy, you'd freeze," he at last observed.

"No one can admire your sense of duty more than I do. But to have you stay here any longer would be out of the question—entirely so."

"Well, what am I to do?"

"Go home, and I, myself, will attend to the matter. I regret to say, however, that I have no acquaintance with this case, outside of what you yourself have told me.

"I think our best plan would be to go and hunt up Mr. Murtagh, and bring him here at once."

"But I was told not to lose sight of the banker," the boy objected, "and I'm afraid if I leave here he will cut out with the other fellow."

"Even if they do you can't run the risk of freezing to death," said Blanchard.

"And don't you see, my lad, that a storm is coming up?"

And Blanchard glanced up at the now threatening heavens, as a few fugitive flakes of snow fell.

"Yes, I was aware that we were going to have a snow-storm for the last hour or more," replied the boy.

"But a snowstorm ain't as bad as being frozen with cold."

"That perhaps is true, my lad," Tom Blanchard answered, smiling.

"I really don't know what to make of you, to tell the honest truth—for a lad of tender years you are the wonder of this nineteenth century."

"You haven't picked up your notebook, Mr. Blanchard," said the sharp-featured lad, as he called the attention of the detective to the memorandum book which lay near him.

Blanchard laughed, and stooping down picked his notebook from the ground.

"I think you remarked that I acted like an escaped lunatic a short while ago," he observed.

"Well, to any stranger I might have appeared such.

"But do you know, my boy, there was a deep problem to be worked out, and in this very square?"

"This was one reason I was acting so strangely.

"But, Tom, I must ask you to do me a favor."

"Are you really serious, Mr. Blanchard, asking a poor lad like me to do you a—"

"A favor, Tom," interrupted Blanchard, with deep earnestness, "and a very simple one.

"It is this:

"Never allude to my peculiar actions of to-night—not even to Mr. Murtagh.

"Some day I may explain, and then you will not be so much astonished.

"You understand me?"

"Certainly, sir.

"But believe me, Mr. Blanchard, I would never allude to it under any circumstances.

"In the first place, I would not have the least desire to do so—and, in the second, it would be entirely out of place for a boy to—"

"That will do, Tom.

"I suppose we understand each other?" said Blanchard.



"Yes, Mr. Blanchard—perfectly."

"Very well, then," pursued the detective, "I think I see a way out of the difficulty that is bothering us just now."

"Remain here while I go and have a look at that house. I won't be gone more than a couple of minutes, when I'll decide what to do."

"All right, sir. I'll go over near the park railings and wait."

"That will do first-class, my lad."

"And now I am off."

The two then separated.

Tom Doolan stole cautiously over to the park railing, taking care not to come within scope of the lighted window.

Blanchard acted with similar caution in getting to his point of vantage.

The detective looked up at the room in which the two conspirators were, for some time.

And while he was thus gazing, the man with the colorless yet sinister face, approached the window and looked out.

Suddenly turning, the man's face was in the full glare of the light, and Blanchard, recognizing it, gave vent to a subdued cry.

"The Asiatic, by all that's wicked!" Tom Blanchard mentally exclaimed.

"I thought he was dead—had died in Sing Sing four years ago!"

"What can Darnley have in common with such a man?"

As Blanchard spoke, the banker, too, appeared at the window, and glued his face against the half frozen panes of glass.

The detective thought for a moment he was seen.

The banker looked with such intensity in his direction.

But this was only fancy on Blanchard's part.

Darnley had not seen him, and had not dreamed of looking in his direction.

His eyes, in point of fact, had been directed skyward.

Both he and Asiatic (as Blanchard had called the sinister-faced man) were watching for evidence of the approaching snowstorm, the harbingers of which, in the shape of big feathery flakes, were descending lazily from the overcast sky.

The two men did not remain at the window more than a minute when they disappeared.

Tom Blanchard, satisfied that they had not seen him, and convinced in his own mind that they were engaged in some wicked plot, left the shadows of the trees and got back to Doolan.

"I have just seen a man whom I thought dead," he observed to the boy; "one of the greatest forgers the world has ever seen."

"Had Mr. Murtagh been here he would have recognized him in a moment."

"They call the man the 'Asiatic,' for what reason I know not, but he is one of the most dangerous men to be at large this country has yet seen."

"Come, we must find, Murtagh."

"We can do no more here, and without Murtagh's counsel nothing whatever can be done."

It was fully eleven o'clock when Blanchard and Doolan left the square.

The snowstorm had already set in, and the night had moderated its intense chilliness.

"Do you know where to find Mr. Murtagh?" the boy asked.

"Yes. But first I must see that you have something to eat," replied the detective.

He could see that Tom was shivering with the cold, and that he looked half starved.

And it went against the kind-hearted detective's heart to see such a boy suffer.

So the detective led the boy to Sixth Avenue.

The first restaurant they came to they entered.

Blanchard ordered a substantial meal for Tom, and satisfied himself with a bottle of Guinness' stout and a cigar.

"Why don't you yourself eat, sir?" asked Tom, not relishing the fact, perhaps, of eating alone.

"Because, my lad, I've already eaten," Blanchard replied.

"Now, I want you to put away that juicy porterhouse and those excellent baked potatoes, and, bear in mind, not a word until you have satisfied the pangs of hunger."

"You look, boy, as if you hadn't eaten in a week."

"Now go ahead, and mind, you're not to talk."

"Eat first, talk afterward, is my motto."

Tom Doolan, who had barely broken his fast that day, ate ravenously.

The steak and potatoes went down with great gusto.

This was followed by two big cups of excellent coffee.

"How do you feel now?" asked Mr. Blanchard when all this was disposed of.

"Never felt better in my life—thanks to you, sir," replied the sharp-featured boy, with gratitude sparkling in his eyes.

"I feel now as if I could tackle twenty thousand storms."

"The porterhouse has made your imagination very strong, Tom," said Blanchard, laughing.

"You mean my exaggeration, Mr. Blanchard," replied Tom wittily.

"Yes, twenty thousand storms is good."

"But you are warm and comfortable, are you not?"

"Bully, sir, bully!"

"Well, now, as you feel so well, we'll go in search of Mr. Murtagh."

"I hope we'll find him, sir."

"No fear of that. We'll find him all right enough," rejoined the detective.

Blanchard, arising from the table, looked at his watch.

It was already a quarter of twelve.

The detective settled his bill, and they left the restaurant.

There was a car passing down Sixth Avenue, and they sprang on and went inside, as it was now snowing at a great rate.

At Thirty-sixth Street the car stopped, and the very young broker, who had gone over to Jersey City with Murtagh, got on.

Catching sight of Tom Blanchard, whom he knew, he went forward.

"Out rather late to-night, Mr. Blanchard?" said he cheerily.

"Yes, Mr. Jarvis"

"Are you looking for any one in particular?"

"Yes, I am."

"I am looking for my partner, in fact," replied Tom.

"Thought as much."

"I left him about twenty minutes ago."

"Where—at the Hoffman?" inquired the detective, who had now arisen to leave the car, to board a Broadway line.

"No—Engle's."

"Thank you very much," said Tom.

"I am glad you told me this, for I was going down to the Hoffman to hunt him up."

"Are you going to Engle's?"

"No, sir; my way is down Sixth Avenue."

"I've been on the hunt for a friend all night, and I believe, as every other place has been searched in vain, I shall find him at my friend Dr. Rogers', on State Street."

"H'm!"

"Who is the gentleman?" asked Tom.

"My friend Langley."

"Langley?"

The name was uttered involuntarily by Doolan.

"Yes, my young gentleman! And what do you know of Langley?"—from the young broker, with a supercilious stare.

"I know one thing, sir," answered Tom Doolan, quietly, "that your friend, Mr. Langley, is running a risk of losing his life, and that the only gentleman who can save him is Mr. Laurence Murtagh."

Jarvis turned as white as ashes.

"Hah, then," said he, "that is the reason Mr. Murtagh is so anxious to find him."

"Here we are at the junction; I am going to get off and go to Engle's."

"I am bound, now, to get all the particulars from Murtagh, for I see my friend's life is indeed in jeopardy."

As the junction at Thirty-third Street was reached the car stopped, and the detective, Jarvis and Doolan got off.

"It's no use waiting for a car. Let us walk," said the broker.

When they got to Engle's they were enveloped in a thick coating of snow.

They had no sooner entered the saloon than Blanchard caught sight of Murtagh in earnest conversation with Mike Mallon, alias Jimmy the Ped.

They were seated at one of the little tables reserved for customers; and from the deep glow on the Irishman's face, it was plain that the crook was the purveyor of some valuable information.

## CHAPTER XV.

LET us retrace our steps to the square to which we have already alluded.



The scene is the third-story room of the brownstone front, from which the only light—if we except that of the street lamp—shone out on the desolate and dreary night already described by us.

It was little wonder that this house was so dreary and deserted looking.

It was unoccupied, and had been for over a year, and saving the one room it was totally unfurnished, from basement to attic.

This room looked out on the little park, inclosed by its iron railings, which we have likewise described in our opening chapter.

Let us enter the room.

The furnishings are elaborate, but it is unnecessary to allude to them further, except to say that the apartment was brilliantly lighted, and that a glowing coal fire burned in a steel grate, which made the room this bitter night warm and cozy.

The *dramatis personæ* we are already on familiar terms with.

Namely, Darnley, the banker, and the sinister-faced man called by Blanchard the "Asiatic."

While Tom Doolan was watching outside, we may describe what was taking place in this third-story apartment of the unoccupied house.

A square mahogany table drawn near the fire was littered with bottles, glasses and cigars.

It was apparent some one was fond of the "creature comforts" in that third-story apartment.

And this person, no doubt was the "Asiatic" referred to by the detective, when he caught a glimpse of his face peering out into the night—a man whom he thought had died in Sing Sing years before.

But dismissing the partiality for drink on the part of the colorless and sinister-faced man, we will listen to what Darnley has to say, for he opens the colloquy which occurs between them.

Darnley had just returned from the window.

He had been regarding the heavens gloomily, and was doubtless dissatisfied with the indications betrayed there.

"There is a change in the weather which I do not like," he began.

"It may prevent Langley from responding to the forged letter which you penned, as I am aware of one weakness to which that gentleman is subject—his dread of exposing himself to storms.

"Is it not strange, a man who may be brave in every other respect, should be timid where a storm is concerned?"

"Not strange, either," responded the other, reflectively.

"I've read of the bravest and ablest men the world has ever seen, who have been affected by less—from Peter the Great, down.

"I have known a roach—a common croton bug—to unnerve one of the most daring fellows I ever met—who, in other respects, feared neither God nor devil.

"But you may be sure of one thing," pursued the sinister-faced man, "and I speak advisedly; if any person will avoid this meeting, it is Tom Masson."

"You don't know Masson a little bit," the banker interrupted, impatiently.

"There, Mr. Darnley, I and you beg to disagree.

"I do know him, and I fancy he knows me.

"But we haven't been intimate for many years. He would sooner handle a cobra or a rattlesnake than touch me.

"I tell you, Darnley, the man doesn't like me, and, for that matter, there is as little love lost on my side.

"However, it is not my purpose to enter into particulars as to that; and it is less your interest to hear anything against your friend.

"Besides, like Ballingdale, I'm in this scheme for what money it will bring.

"I am tired of the criminal life I once led, and would prefer making a haul and retiring.

"If I had the money, I'd leave this country quickly—trust me for that.

"It's no use denying it, it's the coin I'm after, nothing else."

"It's none of my business how Langley is put out of the way.

"I have no objection to his living, and it's not through enmity I agree to acting this part.

"No, sir"—with emphasis—"and of that you may rest assured!

"Masson can live, too, so far as I am concerned; I'm perfectly impervious to any ill will against the man.

"But take my word, if the matter is left to him, Langley may cheat us all, and live to a ripe old age, and marry and settle down with Miss Gunnison and her five hundred thousand dollars, and whatever more she may have.

"It has always been a matter of surprise to me that such a bright, clever woman could be so humbugged by her dear old uncle, the multi-millionaire, whose name is spelled D-a-r-n-l-e-y!"

This covert sneer was not relished by the banker, who replied:

"Come, 'Asiatic,' don't you think you are going too far?"

"Do you imagine for a moment that it is to *your* interest to quarrel with *me*—the very man whom you must acknowledge has always put fortune in your way?"

"And through whose engineering I was sent to Sing Sing," bitterly reproached the other.

"Now, there you're wrong.

"I won't have you say that, for it's not true"—from the banker, indignantly.

"Well, have it as you will, I say nothing further; I have done."

"Then be done"—decisively.

"Neither you nor myself came here to quarrel, I hope and trust.

"This affair, if successful, is thirty thousand dollars in your pocket.

"Do you know what such a sum means?"

"It means a life of ease and luxury on the other side, in the great metropolis of the world, of which you are so fond, the Mecca and paradise of your imaginings and longings—London.

"If you should prefer Paris, however, then Paris let it be.

"Accomplish this task, even in the event of Masson's failure, and you leave New York with a small fortune."

"But what if Miss Gunnison should oppose your wishes?" demanded the other, with a sneer.

"Then I have another way—taking the matter in my own hands and disposing of her as Masson and you will dispose of Langley."

"How is it you don't take Ballingdale into account?" the other asked.

"In the event of both of your failures, Ballingdale, of course, comes in.

"But there will be no failure in this case, you can rest assured.

"Should Langley escape to-night, we can as effectually settle him some other time.

"But to-night, if possible, the deed must be done.

"Now, let there be no more criminations or recriminations.

"You want money, I want money, and Masson and Ballingdale want money."

"Yes, that is true"—musingly from the Asiatic, as he rose from his chair and approached the single window of the room.

"The storm is on in full, Darnley," said he, coming back.

"It'll be a blizzard.

"I trust they'll both come and not disappoint. What o'clock is it?"

The banker looked at his watch.

"Nearly midnight," he replied.

"But, stop! my watch is wrong, too; it is within half an hour of twelve.

"I forgot I put my time forward a little.

"Will you require my presence any further tonight?"

"What can you do?" came from the sinister-faced man, indifferently.

"Nothing much," replied Darnley.

"Then I will not require you.

"I fancy I've the programme arranged in my head; and as the saying is, too many cooks spoil the broth, it is equally applicable that too many workmen bungle a safe and sure job.

"No, Darnley; I've undertaken this myself, and shall not need your services.

"Go! I assure you, you would only be in the way.

"Further, your natural timidity—cowardice, I should call it—would ruin the subtlest schemes that ever emanated from the brain of man."

"You're merry in your compliments, my friend," said the banker, frowning.

"Merry or no, it's the truth"—bluntly.

"Come, I will see you to the door."

And he did.



## CHAPTER XVI.

ABOUT half an hour or so before Blanchard, the broker and the boy entered Engle's, Larry Murtagh was accosted in the street by a woman who called herself Madge Mallon, and introduced herself as the wife of the crook of that name.

The Irishman had grown sick and tired of hunting for Langley, the broker.

After returning from Jersey City with Jarvis, both men had visited various resorts, which the broker's friend had averred that Langley was in the habit of frequenting.

"Having left Jersey City, he must now be in New York," said the young man confidently, "and I know a round dozen places which he frequents."

"You are aware of one affair, I suppose?"

"What is that?" Murtagh asked.

"That my friend has one weakness."

Murtagh laughed.

It sounded funny to speak of a man having "a weakness."

"I guess we're pretty much all in the same boat," he retorted dryly.

"But this is a particular weakness," averred Jarvis, seriously.

"You don't mean his weakness of being in love with Miss Gunnison?" said Murtagh.

"Certainly not."

"But who told you about that?"

"I thought it was common property."

"And isn't it?"

"Well, I guess not."

"I think I said once before to-night that my friend Langley is one of the most reserved of men?"

"Yes, those were your words as I recall them."

"But as to who told me, that is a different matter."

"It's sufficient that I have heard it, and that it is no secret."

"Well, I thought it was."

"But that is not the particular weakness I allude to."

"No?"

"What then?"

"Langley is a gambler?"

This was no news to Murtagh.

"I think you brokers are pretty much alike in that respect," he rejoined.

"Still you misunderstand me," averred Jarvis.

"You are not the only person I've misunderstood in my time," the Irishman returned.

"You see, I have put myself up as a physiognomist, and have so often been deceived in my diagnosis of character that I now think physiognomy a fraud, pure and simple."

Now the Irishman believed nothing of the sort.

On the contrary, he had as firm a belief in Lavater's doctrine as he had ever had.

But he was inclined to be captious, and considering his ill luck that day he might well be forgiven for anything he might have said.

"Apart from physiognomy, which I believe in no more than myself," went on the young man, siding with the detective's humor, "I did not allude to the gambling in stocks, but another sort of gambling, with which you, Mr. Murtagh, are as familiar as any man in the city."

"If you allude to faro bank or any of the other games, you are mistaken," replied the detective.

"And to further enlighten you," added he, "I cannot play the simplest game of cards."

"In fact, my dear boy, I couldn't tell one card from another."

"So you see how far you are out in your conjecture. But apart from all this, I am sorry that Mr. Langley should waste his time at such work."

"Are you really serious?" demanded the young man.

"Serious? I was never more so in my life."

"I regard this weakness in young men as so many incentives to crime."

"For instance, the respectable and growing young man—I mean the one who has a bright business career before him—who has lofty ambitions to succeed in life and to grow up honest and honorable, is often led away by the glamour of the gambling table."

"And this is his first downward step, taken from the path of rectitude by some wild, dissolute companion, till his career ends in flight for some speculation, but still oftener ends his usefulness within the four walls of a prison."

"Am I not right?" ended Murtagh, with feeling.

The young broker regarded the Irishman curiously.

It never occurred to him that a detective could be so

straight-laced or have such peculiar ideas of right and wrong.

But nevertheless, Murtagh's words, uttered as they were, greatly increased his respect for the man.

"You have given me a lesson, Mr. Murtagh," said Jarvis, "which I shall never forget."

"You have the right ideas of life."

"Your words have been as valuable as a hundred sermons."

"In point of fact I never thought you detectives were—"

"What?" the Irishman interrupted gravely.

"So moral, so straight-laced, so really Christian-like."

"I have spoken from experience," said the detective.

"I have seen too many of the evil results of this gambling spirit, in ruined reputations, homes and death, to regard it lightly without uttering words condemning it in the full force of my consciousness of what is right and proper. And now, if you please, we shall go in further search of your friend, and if it is possible to find him in any of those places you mention, find him we shall."

"Very well, Mr. Murtagh; I shall act as your guide."

About ten or twelve places were visited—among the rest gambling resorts—but no Mr. Langley could be found.

At last, disgusted and disgruntled at their want of success, the two gentlemen separated.

And at this point we come to Mrs. Mallon, Mike Mallon's wife.

Larry Murtagh was sauntering along Broadway, cogitating on his want of success, and reflecting on what he had best do next, when this woman accosted him.

"Mr. Murtagh," said she, stopping the detective, "may I have a word with you?"

The Irishman looked at her for a moment as if trying to place her.

In this he failed, however.

He had never met her before.

She was unknown to him in fact.

"Well, madam, what can I do for you?" he said brusquely.

"My husband desires to see you," replied the woman.

"Your husband?"

"Do I know him, madam?"

The detective looked hard at her.

"Well, you ought to," returned the woman, nettled at the manner of his treatment.

"He has done many a service for you."

"His name is Mallon, Mike Mallon, and he has been searching high and low for you."

"It is for your benefit not his," she added, tartly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Mallon," instantly apologized Murtagh.

"I meant no offense, I assure you, and how could I know you, my dear madam, when, to my knowledge, I never saw you before?"

This at once mollified the woman.

She was now as ready in her apologies as the Irishman himself.

To be brief, the final outcome of this interview was that Murtagh appointed to meet Mallon at Engle's on Twenty-ninth Street.

"Tell Mr. Mallon, please, I shall wait for him there," he said.

This was how the second interview was brought about that night, between Jimmy the Ped and the Irish detective.

After Mrs. Mallon left him, Murtagh went back to Engle's, and, taking a seat at one of the tables, waited with some impatience for her husband.

In the meantime the storm had come on as we have said, and by the time Mallon arrived the clouds of crystal masses were coming down in pretty lively fashion.

## CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN the "Asiatic" had seen Darnley into the street, he once more returned to the apartment on the third story of the brownstone front, to which we have already so frequently alluded.

It was evident now that the man was unnerved.

While the banker was present he had concealed his real feelings, and he had assumed an air of bravado which was far from being natural.

This man had a wonderful control over himself.

So long as there was anybody present he neither showed fear nor dread of consequences.

But, alone, all this was changed.



As he returned to the room his colorless face was still more colorless.

His agitation was shown in every feature.

His hand twitched and trembled as though with ague.

"Cursed, terrifying nervousness!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"I accuse Darnley of cowardliness!"

"Who now is the coward?"

"I am trembling like a child, or some feeble old woman!"

"Good God! is this a premonition of failure? or of my being sent back again to that cursed prison, where I endured ten thousand deaths during the few years I spent there?"

"Pshaw! my nerves are all unstrung.

"I have been drinking too much of late.

"That's the whole trouble.

"Another glass or two will brace me up."

There stood a bottle of brandy on the table.

This had not yet been opened.

The "Asiatic" uncorked the bottle, and, taking up a tumbler, nearly filled it with the liquor.

"Ah!" said he, holding it up to the light.

"There is nothing like this tippie to steady a man's nerves.

"What a glorious drink! though it sends the blood like molten lead through one's veins and makes a fiend of me.

"Well, what matters?"

"Here's to that thirty thousand dollars which will send me out of the country!"

With a single gulp the sinister-faced man tossed off the contents of the glass.

The liquor had a wonderful effect on him.

His eyes blazed now like living coals.

The hands no longer trembled and twitched.

But not content with one drink, he tossed off another and another.

"Now," said he, "I feel as if I could annihilate a whole city—ay, a hundred cities.

"Let them come; I am prepared; my nerves are steel!"

And indeed it seemed as though they were.

The liquor had wrought a most extraordinary change in the Asiatic.

It seemed as though there was a brightness in his eye and a color in his face which were never there before.

We have described in the initial chapter of this story the face which might have been continuously seen at the window, peering into the storm-tossed night, as though expecting the arrival of some one.

Many times had this man gone to the window and looked out on the square.

This restlessness was due to the man's nervous action, as well as to his impatience.

"Yes," he said, as he returned from making his last observation of the dreary space beyond, "the snow storm has set in in earnest—now all that is wanted is the victim.

"I am glad this part of the programme is unknown to Masson.

"Darnley is no fool—though a much more subtle scoundrel than his friend, Tom."

It would appear from what the Asiatic had said, that Tom Masson was unacquainted with this part of the plot.

His action in our opening chapter proved that beyond doubt.

But if the broker was ignorant of what was to occur from the unoccupied house, it was not so with Bill Ballingdale.

The ex-pugilist had already been made acquainted with the matter.

But not by the banker.

Unknown to both the banker and Masson, the "Asiatic" had been the friend of Ballingdale for many years, and thus it came about that he was let into the fact of what was to be enacted from the unoccupied house that night.

This was one reason the sinister-faced man was so anxious to get rid of Darnley.

Having succeeded in getting rid of the banker, the "Asiatic" was prepared to receive his friend, Ballingdale. The man looked at his watch after his second or third visit to the window.

It wanted a quarter of twelve o'clock.

"This is about Bill's time to be here," he muttered.

"He said a quarter of twelve, and made it imperative that nobody else should be in the secret.

"I promised, as my friend is a man on whom one can rely.

"Ha! there he is now."

This exclamation was caused by a shrill whistle from the square.

To make certain, however, that his man had arrived, the "Asiatic" approached the window once more and looked out.

About twelve or fourteen feet from the sidewalk a strong, athletic-looking man was gesticulating with his hands, as if to attract attention, and looking up at the window simultaneously.

"Ballingdale, sure enough, and on time!"

Without further comment the "Asiatic" left the room and hurried downstairs.

Opening the front door, he admitted the ex-pugilist.

"I am glad you have come, Bill"—grasping the ex-pugilist's powerful hand and bestowing on it a friendly shake.

"I was anxious when the quarter of twelve came, and, indeed, disappointed you were not here to the second."

"I said a quarter of twelve sharp," came from Ballingdale, hoarsely, "and I am rather under than over my time.

"Was Darnley here?"

"Yes."

"You told him nothing with regard to me, I hope?"

"Nothing."

"Nor does Masson suspect?"

"If you mean in respect to your or my presence here, certainly not.

"He knows nothing of this part of the scheme, I tell you, and, so far as the banker is concerned, he is not likely to know."

"Had you much trouble getting rid of Darnley?" Bill asked.

"None whatever."

"The fellow is chicken-hearted!"

"That's what I say"—from the Asiatic.

"You couldn't keep the man here with a team of oxen while this Langley business was on.

"So you see I got him out of the house with very few words.

"I even cast doubts on his courage to test him; but bless you, Bill, I knew what sort of chap I had to deal with, and the more I said the more frightened he appeared to be."

"Well, it wouldn't take a man with an extensive knowledge of character to see that.

"I knew from the first moment I clapped eyes on the old hawk that, though the biggest rogue in all Gotham, he was also the greatest craven.

"But I wouldn't be so sure of the other man."

"To whom do you allude?" asked the Asiatic.

"Tom Masson."

"Hum! I know Masson as well as any man living, and if he don't flunk at the last moment it will surprise me."

"I don't think there's much fear of that," replied Ballingdale, shaking his head.

"Don't be too sure.

"However, there goes twelve o'clock!"

"We shall soon see whether I am right or not."

The reader must not imagine that this colloquy took place on the stairs leading up to the third-story bedroom.

For if he did, he would be entirely mistaken.

The foregoing conversation really occurred in the apartment while Bill Ballingdale was disposing of a big glass of brandy.

"Pretty tough night, Bill," casually remarked the Asiatic.

"Yes," growled Bill; "and going to be tougher.

"But, I say, old fellow! what if those blooming ducks don't turn up?"

"Then all our trouble for the present goes for nothing," the sinister-faced man answered.

"But what if they should turn up, and Langley is fixed?"

"Well?"

"Are we sure of the 'sponds?"

"Now," went on Bill, "provided the gal turns obstinate, and'll not cotton to that Masson whether or no—what then?"

"You need have no fear on that head, Bill.

"Darnley has arranged for all that.

"He's got such a hold on the girl that she daren't go against his wishes.

"If she does—"

The Asiatic stopped short.

Whatever he was going to add, he thought it better, for reasons of prudence, to keep to himself.

For an instant Ballingdale looked at him suspiciously.

"Why in hades don't you go on," he growled, "and finish what you were going to say?"

"Guess we're old friends, aren't we?"



"And what one knows, the other should—and no thanks to either."

"If she does object—what then?"

"What then?" repeated the sinister-faced man, in a shrill voice.

"I'll tell you what then—she'll not live to repeat her refusal."

"Would he murder the gal?"

"No, he wouldn't; but he knows of others that would—for a consideration."

"Besides, Bill, I'm now going to let you into a secret that you didn't know."

"The moment the girl's out of the way her five hundred thousand dollars belong to Darnley, Masson, you and myself."

"Darnley would like, of course, to collar the pile."

"But as I, with my little instrument, which I call a pen, fixed the matter up, there must be a square deal all round."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"A FORGERY?" exclaimed Ballingdale.

"Yes, if you like to call it so," returned the "Asiatic," slowly and with great deliberation, "a forgery."

"Oh, my dear fellow," continued he, with a bland smile which, on his face, looked like the leer of some dreadful satyr, "you don't know yet of the many great qualities which I possess, and probably never will."

"But it is time now that I should take up my post at the window."

"Those gentlemen, if they come at all, will come in carriages, and I must watch the arrivals."

"Of course Masson will play the indignant, and there will be a war of words, and then blows, followed by the sudden pop of a revolver."

"But I must likewise see to my firearms"—with a laugh that must have frozen the blood of any one possessed of the slightest feeling of humanity. "I also have my work to do, and if that fellow Masson fails in the accomplishment of his purpose, it will be my turn to step in—one who never fails!"

"Hear me, Ballingdale."

"This man Langley must die!"

The Asiatic's face was perfectly fiendish as he uttered the foregoing words.

But neither his face nor words made any perceptible impression on the ex-pugilist.

Indeed that personage was too case-hardened, if all the crimes in the decalogue were discussed, to betray any exhibition of feeling one way or other.

"Now, there is just one thing I want you to do, Bill," went on the Asiatic.

"Well, drive along," growled Ballingdale.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Take part in this little drama which has been gotten up for the express purpose of Mr. Langley's benefit?"

This last sarcastically.

"No, Ballingdale; you must promise to take neither hand nor part in to-night's work."

"That right I reserve for myself."

"If that's all you want, my friend," replied the ex-pugilist, with a broad grin on his ugly face, "I promise you that no act of mine shall interfere in the work you have cut out for yourself."

"That's all I want to impose on you," returned the Asiatic.

Thereupon he went back to the window, and remained looking out into the storm for some time.

Presently he saw a carriage roll up.

It stopped within a few yards of the street-lamp.

The door of the vehicle opened.

A man sprang out.

He said something to the driver of the conveyance.

A few seconds after the carriage wheeled round, and turning the corner of the square, disappeared.

The Asiatic watched the man, who now stood like a statue under the street-lamp.

"What are you looking so intently at?" demanded Ballingdale impatiently.

He did not know what had occurred in the square a few moments before.

He saw the Asiatic watching, and was curious to know why he should continue his gaze so long in the darkness.

"One of our men has arrived," was the nonchalant reply.

"Which of them?"

Without removing his gaze from the square, the Asiatic answered:

"I am trying to make out."

"I can't very well say."

"He is so muffled and be-coated, that it is impossible to tell who."

"Besides, Langley and Masson are about one size and height," Ballingdale interjected coolly.

"That, probably, is the reason that it is out of the question to recognize the man."

"And this confounded snow is blurring everything."

As the Asiatic spoke, the second carriage rolled into the square.

There was no mistake that it was a vehicle.

Its flashing lights would put that beyond all doubt.

The second carriage stopped as the first did.

A man alighted.

His burly form came for an instant within the focus of the flashing lamps.

But a moment after the vehicle had rolled away.

The man also disappeared.

The great clouds of snow and darkness hid him from view.

Then he suddenly reappeared.

"Here's the other coming," observed the Asiatic, still keeping his face turned to the square.

"Ha! Then they have both come?" ejaculated Ballingdale.

"Yes."

"Do you recognize the second man?"

"Upon my life, no more than the first."

"Though I should judge this second man is Langley."

"Can you not tell?"

"Let me have a squint."

"I'd know Langley from a thousand," ejaculated Bill.

"No, no; keep back! All in good time, Bill."

"Neither man must know that he is being watched."

The Asiatic, though he drew a little aside while he spoke, still kept his eyes riveted on the square.

"Hah!" he suddenly aspirated.

"The men have met!"

"The forged letter to Langley had due effect."

"And now they are having high words!"

"Another instant and they'll be at one another's throat."

"Good!"

"What is good?" questioned the now excited and curious Ballingdale.

"They are showing the letters."

"Both appear to be astonished."

"On Masson's part it is a fake."

"On Langley's genuine."

Suddenly the Asiatic sprang from the window, with an excited gesture.

"What now?" demanded the equally excited Ballingdale.

But the Asiatic, instead of replying, made a fierce gesture for silence, and, with a growl like an infuriated wild animal, bounded from the room and down the stairs.

"That fellow's gone suddenly mad!" ejaculated Bill, glancing at the door.

"What the d—l does he mean rushing from the room in that way?"

"Gad! Queer if he should have taken leave of his senses!"

"I always did think he had a mad streak in him."

"All them geniuses are mad as a rule."

The next thing that the ex-pugilist heard was the sharp, quick report of a pistol shot.

"So it comes to be a shootin' match after all," muttered Ballingdale.

"Get at it, you lubbers, and murder one another quick!"

"As for me—I'm for a drink."

Ballingdale was in the act of raising a half glass of brandy to his lips when there rang upon his ears the report of a second pistol shot.

The pugilist trembled all over.

His face paled.

The glass he held poised to his lips fell on the table with a crash.

"Good God! what does that mean?" quavered Bill.

He was thoroughly frightened now.

"We'll all be lagged for this!"

The one shot, which had little effect on the ex-pugilist, when followed by another and an entirely unexpected one, almost paralyzed him with fear.

In imagination he saw prison gates open to receive him.

"Two shots!" he kept muttering to himself and looking toward the door with a livid face.

"By —! we'll all be scragged sure!"



It will be seen from this that Ballingdale, though a one-time cracker-jack pugilist, was not possessed of the right kind of courage.

So scared indeed was he that for the moment he was absolutely glued to the spot.

Two minutes later the Asiatic, true to his ferocious character, re-entered the room with a gory trophy in his hand.

A human ear, severed close to the head!

The Asiatic wore a look of such cold-blooded cruelty that it made even Bill Ballingdale shudder.

"What have you there?" he asked, as he somewhat recovered his composure.

"Don't you see? It is Langley's ear! I couldn't resist the temptation of having a souvenir of to-night's work, which my descendents may look at with pride when I'm dead."

The ex-pugilist, who had now completely regained his lost nerve, turned away in disgust, while a smile, which might have graced the physiognomy of the father of evil, wreathed the Asiatic's lips.

"Where's Masson?"—from Ballingdale, with partly-averted face.

"Fled."

"Did he kill Langley?"

"He fired the first shot, but it missed."

"And the second?"

"Was mine, and I killed him—*killed*, d'ye hear, Ballingdale!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

LARRY MURTAGH had not been waiting very long at Engle's when Mike Mallon dropped into the saloon, as we have already described.

That the crook's communication was of importance could be seen instantly.

The man's big blue eyes were brighter than ever before, and his hairless face glowed with enthusiasm.

Seeing Murtagh at a table in the center of the room, he hurried over to him.

"Sit down, Mike," said the detective kindly.

"I hear you've been looking for me?"

"Yes, indeed; I've been hunting everywhere for you, sir—that is, at every place I could think of."

"But it was left to a woman," added Mike, with an arch twinkle, "to find you."

"She was about to give you a little of her mind, too, let me tell you, sir."

"I fancy you're doing an injustice to Mrs. Mallon," replied the Irishman, laughing.

"I don't think she'd offend me for the world, or anybody else."

"The trouble was I didn't recognize her soon enough."

"She told me you didn't recognize her at all," replied the naive Mike, "and for that reason she was mad, and meant to give you a talking to."

"You know some women have sharp tongues," Mallon added, his fine mouth puckered up grimly.

"But don't mind a woman's tantrums, sir. They forgive and forget readily enough, and that's the way the sex ought to be."

"However, now we're together, I'm going to impart information which may be of value, and which I got in a rather curious way."

"One condition is, though—you must not ask me who my informant is, for I shall not tell you."

"It's enough that it comes from a woman's lips—"

"I comprehend. From Mrs. Mallon's lips," said the Irishman.

"Not on your life," said Mike, with pretended indignation.

"But I told you I wouldn't give you my informant's name, and I won't."

"But, Mr. Murtagh?"

"What, Mike?"

"Don't you think this is too public a place to talk?"

A part of the room at the time was full of customers, and most of the tables occupied.

"Is this information of yours really so important, then?" asked the Irishman.

"Well, sir, it refers to a former talk between us; and, when I tell you it is a matter of life and death, you may judge whether it is or not."

"It is a pretty rough night, Mike," remarked the detective.

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Too boisterous to pay a visit to your favorite stamping grounds, the Nag's Head."

"Besides," added the Irishman, "I am expecting some one—he may be here at any moment—so I am loath to move till I see him."

"By the way, there's a table lower down the room"—and the detective indicated one of the small tables which was in a corner by itself.

"I fancy if we go there we might fear neither interruption nor listening."

"I quite agree with you, sir. We'll go there," said Mike, quite satisfied that Murtagh was right.

A moment or two later the two men were seated at the table in question, having first given an order to one of the waiters to bring them their drinks.

"Now, Mike," began the detective, "just drive ahead and let me know what this information tends to."

"You say it is in some respects connected with our talk earlier in the night?"

"Yes, sir; it is."

"Relating to Masson and Langley?"

"Precisely."

"And the banker, too, I presume?"

"And the banker—certainly."

"But we mustn't forget the other gentlemen," continued Mike.

"You mean Ballingdale?"

"Exactly, sir! Ballingdale, one of the head d—ls of the conspiracy."

"But there is another man who must not be lost sight of—the 'Asiatic'."

"What do you mean by the 'Asiatic'?" Murtagh asked.

"It's not a *what*, sir; it's a *whom*," returned Mike, facetiously.

"I deserved that, Mike," grinned the detective.

"Deserved what, sir?"

"Your correction."

"But, aside from all this," he went on, "do you allude to the noted forger who went by that name?"

"Exactly, Mr. Murtagh."

The Irishman appeared to be surprised.

"Aren't you mistaken, Mike?"

"In what regard?"

"This forger; the 'Asiatic,' as you call him."

"The man has been dead four or five years."

"That's news to me," said Mike, puckering up his lips.

"Where did he die?"

"Where he was last imprisoned—Sing Sing."

"That's further news to me."

"The man didn't die in Sing Sing."

"He escaped through the negligence of one of the high officials of the prison, and to shut off investigation, they reported the Asiatic dead."

"But you'll find him very much alive, Mr. Murtagh, I assure you," said Mike.

"In fact, he's another of the head d—ls in this conspiracy."

"Did you hear of a letter which Mr. Langley received from Tom Masson?"

"Yes, from Miss Gunnison," Murtagh replied.

"Well, sir, that letter was not written by Masson at all, and if he was brought into a court of justice he'd be acquitted."

"This conspiracy has been devilish—devilish, Mr. Murtagh," ended Mike, frowning.

"It does look so, Mike."

"Is that all?"

"No, nor half. Masson is supposed to have received a letter from Langley."

"That, too, is a forgery."

"Don't you see how these rascals are working?"

"Langley is to be murdered; Darnley, the banker—an old thief and hypocrite and fraud—is to force his supposed niece—goodness knows whether she is his niece or not; I couldn't swear that she isn't—however, this gray-haired rascal, aware that his ward (for she is his ward, whatever else she may be); aware, I say, that she has over half a million dollars in her own right, means forcing her into a marriage with Masson, so that the whole caboodle of 'em can rob her of her money."

"My impression is that Darnley has hypnotized the woman, and that she has no will of her own, whether she marries Langley or Masson."

"There is one thing certain; she will never marry Langley, for they mean to kill him."

"How do you know?"

"That, sir, is one of my sources of information."

"But, to proceed."



"Langley out of the way, Masson puts in an appearance as the lover of Miss Gunnison.

"If she refuses him, and Darnley has not the power to force her, then there is one thing left—she follows Langley as sure as sun and moon shine in the heavens."

"But that will not give these scoundrels her fortune?" interpolated Murtagh, filled with horror at what he had heard.

"Oh, there's where you are mistaken," replied Mike.

"You must not lose sight of the Asiatic, the most ingenious forger in the country.

"This rascal plays a king-pin hand in the game.

"He is told to do a certain thing and he does it, and is well paid for his work.

"Now for Ballingdale.

"Ballingdale and the Asiatic are fast friends.

"They are both useful in their way to Darnley—and if he raises his little finger and suggest money both will commit murder without scruple—especially the Asiatic, one of the most cruel and brutal monsters who ever lived. He is murderous for the sake of being murderous, and would cut your throat or mine, if he had the chance, for the mere gratifying of his murderous instincts.

"The sight of blood infuriates, enrages and makes a demon of him.

"But now to come to the point of my visit, I am informed from a reliable source—a source, however, which shall be nameless—but a person who is in a way very near to this man, Ballingdale—I am informed that the broker, Langley, is to be done away with to-night."

"What?"

And Murtagh sprang to his feet.

"Don't get excited," said the crook.

"Sit down, please, or else you'll attract notice.

"I see already a dozen pair of eyes riveted on us, and it is as well to be careful, especially as some of Darnley's creatures may be here.

"Yes, they are to murder him to-night, but we will save him.

"If any suffer they shall be Darnley and his company of cut-throats and swindlers."

"But, my dear Mike," declared the Irishman, excitedly, "we must find Langley at once and warn him before it's too late.

"But did I hear you aright?"

"In respect to what, Mr. Murtagh?" asked Mike.

"The meeting of Langley and Masson."

"Yes; that meeting will be brought about by the forged letters," replied Mallon.

"Why, goodness gracious, Mr. Murtagh, I never saw you so excited in my life," averred Mallon.

"You need have no fear about saving Langley from this nest of assassins.

"I know where they are to meet and the time, and I know a little more, which may be of use to you.

"Were you ever up at — Square?"

"— Square?" Murtagh repeated. "Certainly; I know — Square well.

"One of the most aristocratic and exclusive places in New York."

"That's right," averred Mike.

"Exactly where Langley and Masson are to meet, and where Langley is to be lured to his death.

"But," added the crook, quietly, as he glanced toward the door, "there are some friends of yours—Mr. Tom Blanchard among the rest."

"Yes, and, by Heaven, the boy, Tom Doolan!" cried Murtagh, as he arose to his feet.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE Irish detective was please indeed to see his old partner, and the lad whom he had engaged to follow the conspirators, come into Engle's at that moment.

But his pleasure knew no bounds when he heard the story of Tom Doolan's grit and unselfishness, from Blanchard.

Besides, Mallon's information was rendered all the more valuable by the account which Blanchard had vouchsafed of the boy's action, in following Darnley and the Asiatic to — Square.

"It was one of the pluckiest bits of work I ever heard of," said Blanchard, enthusiastically.

"This lad, Doolan, is a little hero.

"Fancy standing out so many hours in the bitter cold, through a pure sense of duty."

"And the expectation of a twenty-dollar bill," added Doolan, demurely.

"Don't you think too much praise will give me a 'swelled head'?"

"This won't give you a 'swelled head,' anyway," the Irishman interjected, opening his pocketbook and handing the boy a crisp twenty-dollar bill.

"I haven't earned it yet, sir," said Tom, drawing back.

"Time to pay when work is done."

"It has been done, my boy—and done well," rejoined the Irishman.

"The laborer is worthy of his hire."

"There, take your wages; you are entitled to the money, Tom.

"Now no nonsense, or I shall be very much annoyed; and we have no time now for fooling, I assure you."

So Tom Doolan was forced to take a bill, which he honestly considered he hadn't earned.

"Well, gentlemen, if you are all through," said Mallon, who took up the expeditious end of the subject, "and if Mr. Jarvis, here, is willing to assist to save his friend, Langley, I propose we start for — Square at once.

"It doesn't want many minutes of twelve.

"And the sooner we're on the ground the better."

"I entirely agree with Mr. Mallon," said Blanchard.

"But how are we going there?"

"I'll solve the problem in double-quick time," chimed in Jarvis.

"Let me see—there are five of us.

"Two hacks, gentlemen, will take us to — Square nicely.

"Oh, no, I wouldn't leave you out, sonny, for a pot of gold.

"To the victor belongs the spoils—I mean the honor.

"Excuse the facetiousness of my remarks," the young broker gayly added, "but I am off for the carriages—so prepare for a dashing ride through the snowstorm."

Mr. Jarvis was gone but a very few minutes when he returned to announce that the vehicles were at the door.

He had no more than done so when an unexpected arrival entered Engle's.

It was Robert Pinkerton.

"I have been looking all over the town for you," said Bob to Murtagh, "and I'm awfully glad to find you in such good company."

And Pinkerton looked at Mallon, who blushed scarlet.

The Irishman felt for the crook, but said nothing.

He meant later reading Mister Bob a lesson.

Meanwhile he briefly explained what had been done, and invited the head of the New York branch of the Pinkerton agency to accompany them to — Square.

"By George, Mr. Mallon, I must beg your pardon!" said Pinkerton, extending his hand.

"I perceive you are a very good friend of Mr. Murtagh, than whom a cleverer detective never breathed, though sometimes he is as unfortunate as myself."

"Yes, indeed," retorted Murtagh, "especially in risking and losing ten thousand dollars through such a dead-beat as this Masson."

"But come, gentlemen; we have no time to discuss that now.

"When I have Masson behind bars I shall have something more to say."

Just then Jarvis reminded them that the hacks were waiting, and that they were, by their peculiar actions, already attracting a crowd.

"That's so," said Bob.

"Those fellows know me, and they don't understand what the deuce I've come here for, unless it be to arrest my friend Murtagh, who, if he had his dues, would be the monarch of all Ireland—and two or three islands, besides.

"But let us start, or we may be mobbed by those delectable actors, journalists and what not."

And thus the party got into the street and into the vehicles; and, though it was snowing fiercely, a curious throng was waiting in the storm to see them drive away.

Murtagh had already arranged with Jarvis to dismiss the Jehus of both conveyances before they got to the square.

Jarvis, Pinkerton and Blanchard thought this a good plan.

Then through the blinding snowstorm the carriages were driven along Broadway, then into Sixth Avenue and down Forty-second Street to their destination.

We have said earlier that we shall not give the location of this particular, exclusive part of New York, and we mean keeping our word.

Between two and three blocks of — Square the car-



riages stopped, and the detectives and their friends got out.

When they saw the cabs returning by the way they came the party set out to walk a few blocks through the blinding snowstorm.

"Hum!" growled Pinkerton, "this is not the pleasantest night to be out on such a diversion.

"I only hope we're not too late to save poor Langley's life.

"I was just thinking the jests indulged in to-night have been sorry ones—especially if the comedy turns out to be a tragedy.

"It is later than I thought, by Jove—a quarter of one o'clock."

"Not quite," chimed Jarvis.

"You are about five minutes ahead of time."

"Then my watch must be wrong," said Bob.

"And, mercy knows, I hope it is.

"Indeed I didn't think it so late.

"This comes of fooling, confound it!"

"Never mind," interjected Mallon.

"We're not late; I'm sure of that."

"I hope not," said the Irishman, "for if we are, poor Langley is a gone man."

The detective's gloomy words had the effect of almost making the sharp-featured lad, Tom Doolan, blubber.

But the next words from Blanchard cheered them up.

"I don't know whether you believe in presentiments, gentlemen," Blanchard observed. "My family, myself included, are noted for premonitions.

"It seems as if a voice had just now whispered to me: 'Langley is right—Masson will be the victim.'

"Is it not strange," added Blanchard, "that every premonition I ever had has come true so far?"

"Mr. Murtagh himself can vouch for the truth of my statement.

"He has seen many things come to pass, which I have in a way prophesied.

"It was the same with my father, and his father before him, and many generations before them again.

"It is also the most singular fact that that power alone remains with the male members of our family.

"My son possesses it, and I'm inclined to think even to a greater degree than myself.

"Again that voice!

"Listen, gentlemen, I heard it say once more—'Langley is right—Masson will be the victim.'"

"That's clairvoyance with a vengeance," interpolated Mallon, "and let us hope, Mr. Blanchard, that your premonition is right.

"But some of the greatest mediums in the world fail at times," he added naively.

"Here we are at last, at the turning of the square," said Murtagh's partner.

"But the snow is so thick I can scarcely see."

"Never mind if your mind can see," put in Bob Pinkerton, with emphasis.

"If the *mind* voice is correct, I'll present you with a solid gold watch, and hail you as a medium of no ordinary powers."

"Thanks, very much," replied Tom, dryly.

"But under such conditions, I accept no presents."

They were now within twenty-five paces of the solitary street lamp which sent out its feeble flicker only to make the darkness more visible.

The party paused for a moment, and strained their eyes through the clouds of falling snowflakes.

Suddenly the boy, Doolan, darted forward.

Had he seen anything lying in the snow half covered with the falling flakes?

They awaited the boy's action breathlessly.

They saw him bend over.

A faint cry escaped the lad.

It could not have been heard more than twenty or twenty-five yards distant.

Yes, Tom Doolan was bending over some object.

That was apparent.

The object was half hidden in the snow, from which the scared lad was brushing away the white covering.

And while he was thus engaged the others rushed up, Pinkerton exclaiming:

"Blanchard, your clairvoyant power has deceived you for once.

"It is poor Langley's body!"

But was it Langley's body?

Was Tom Blanchard's presentiment in the present case right?

Alas, no.

For once his clairvoyant power had deserted him completely.

The body found lying prone within a few paces of the street lamp was that of Langley, the broker.

He was stone dead!

The bullet of the Asiatic had passed through his right lung, and the murdered man's left ear was missing.

"There is no time to lose," said Mallon.

"Tom Masson didn't murder this man.

"But I know who did—the Asiatic.

"The severing of this poor fellow's ear is one of the marks of his brutal and ungovernable cruelty.

"If you would find the murderer of Mr. Langley, you must hunt down the Asiatic."

"I don't think we'll have far to go to find him," said Blanchard, whose ideas of the perfection of clairvoyance were somewhat cruelly dispelled.

"Follow me, gentlemen, and we'll soon land him by the heels."

"Where are we to find him?" asked Pinkerton.

Blanchard pointed to the still lighted window of the brownstone front.

"We'll find him there!" he replied.

"The murderer of Mr. Langley is in that room."

The words had barely passed the detective's lips, when a loud explosion thundered into the night.

Simultaneously with the explosion the light in the third-story window went out into darkness.

The silence which followed was as profound as the grave.

The detectives rushed up the stoop, and by their united efforts burst in the door.

Then the whole party clattered up the stairs, Murtagh leading the way by the aid of the vivid glare of a dark lantern.

They soon reached the room where the explosion had occurred.

Bottles, glasses, even the tables and chairs, were a wreck; and lying over each other near the fire, blackened and almost unrecognizable, where the dead bodies of Bill Ballingdale, ex-puglist, and the "Asiatic," forger and murderer!

Clutched tightly in the "Asiatic's" hand was the missing ear of the murdered man.

How the explosion had occurred, and from what source, was never known.

Neither was Masson ever seen from that day to this; and it was said at the time by fellow-brokers, that, thinking he had murdered his old-time partner, Langley, he had, in his desperation, thrown himself from a ferryboat crossing to Jersey City, thus committing suicide.

Before Murtagh or his aids could succeed in arresting Darnley, the banker, that hoary rascal had succeeded in escaping to Europe, where, a few years later, he died a miserable and degraded old man.

In a way, Larry Murtagh was correct in his diagnosis of Miss Gunnison's character. She did not break her heart after poor Langley; and in less than six months following his murder, she married a wealthy banker of Philadelphia.

[THE END.]



# Lost Upon Dartmoor.

THE thickly-scribbled pages of my notebook record no more pleasant reminiscence than that which I am now about to transcribe.

I was spending a few days in delightful Devonshire for the recruitment of my health, when, being something of a botanist, the fancy seized me of visiting Dartmoor, and passing a few hours in the examination of its peculiar Flora.

I did pass a very pleasant day there, and scarcely felt the fatigue, the exhaustion, which eager rambling here and there during seven or eight hours must have caused; forgetting, too, that the farstretching wilderness was unknown to me; that, except in broad daylight, the faint foot tracks which cross it, leading to and from the habitations of man, could not be discerned.

The summer day had, moreover, been unusually warm, and at about five in the evening I—having eaten heartily, drank a quart of strong bottled ale—felt, and no wonder, as I lay upon the grass, an irresistible drowsiness steal over me.

Ah, well, there would be at that season of the year four hours of daylight; I might indulge, therefore, in a short nap—just half an hour; I should awake at the mentally-determined time, as I had done in scores of instances before, and, refreshed with sleep, should reach home in three hours at the most.

Man proposes, God disposes; and I sometimes think—I confess to being somewhat superstitious (who, that has gone to and fro upon the face of the earth, and witnessed the moral marvels constantly occurring in its daily life, is not more or less so?)—I sometimes think that the want of caution on my part in permitting myself to go to sleep on a wild, trackless moor at five in the evening, after a day of such exhaustive, however pleasurable, exertion, was super-naturally inspired.

That may be a foolish fancy. The unquestionable fact was that the half hour I had allowed myself expanded to at least ten half hours, and that, when I awoke and recognized, not without difficulty, where I was and how I came there, it was pitch dark, and a damp, raw air—the wind having no doubt changed—was, though the month was August, chilling the genial current of my blood.

I roused myself resolutely, got up, felt, instead of rested very much, stiffened by slumber, and thought of the three hours' walk before me with something like dismay, especially when conscious, as I presently was, that a cold, drizzling rain had set in, and that, owing to the darkness, I knew no more in what direction to proceed than if I had been a blind man suddenly abandoned in a strange place.

I had heard often of persons having been lost upon Dartmoor, and who had perished there; but they were feeble creatures, mostly women and children—and the season was winter.

Snow storms obliterating the pathways would render it almost impossible for strangers to find their way across the bleak moor, untenanted, save by the sheep, with here and there a shepherd snowed up in his miserable hut.

I was in no such peril. Still, to pass six or seven night hours beneath that chill, and faster, faster falling rain would be exceedingly unpleasant, and remembering that a river always runs toward the abode of men, I sought to find the banks of the Dart.

It is wonderful how sound deceives as to the direction from which it reaches you.

I am told that for that reason alarm bells, intended to warn the crews of vessels that they are running upon rocks have been long since discontinued.

However that may be this I know, that although after about an hour's wanderings, I managed to get within hearing of the ripple of the Dart, I could not for the life of me gain its bank. It was here, it was there; and, at last, after long, fruitless exertion, I ran my angry head against a

shepherd's hut. The blow was rather a severe one, for I was pursuing that dodging, rascally river as if it were a felon striving to avoid my clutch, and gifted with ventriloquist power, by the aid of which, in the darkness, he mockingly baffled my efforts.

Very stupid, no doubt; but a miserable man, benighted in a drenching rain upon an unescapable moor, may be forgiven a little foggy bewilderment. A very thirsty man, moreover, and getting hungry. True there was water everywhere; never were drunkards' brain so soaked with liquid as were my habiliments, but not a drop to drink, though I held my wide-opened mouth to catch the rain. The mouth was a part of the animal economy which it passed slantingly by.

I was intensely savage. There was another quart bottle of prime Devonshire ale somewhere upon that confounded moor, also delicious sandwiches; but where? That was the question, not resolvable by me; though scarcely five minutes after I woke and started off home, as I thought, it occurred to me that the possession of the bottle of ale, the sandwiches did not so much signify, would be very desirable. I turned to find it. Find it! find a needle in a truss of hay as easily. The d—l fly away with Dartmoor. It was the first time and would be the last time that I went botanizing thereon.

The reader can now in some degree realize to him or herself the sweet temper I was in when my head butted against the shepherd's hut.

The blow was, in a certain sense, a sobering one. Would it not, I reflected, be wiser to get and keep under shelter till day dawned, instead of blundering about, now this, now that way, as I had been doing? Of course it would. So I felt along the wooden paling of the hut till I came to the opening, called, I supposed, the doorway, though door there was none, and never had been.

It proved to be one of the better sort of huts, having two rooms; the inner one used as a bedchamber. There was a wooden partition dividing the two, through a wide crevice in which faintly streamed the light of a lamp or candle.

Groping my way onward, I presently found myself in the inner room. It was untenanted; the light was that of a rush candle nearly burned out; and in one corner was a heap of straw, upon which was spread a coarse coverlet. There was a rude settle or stool, upon which I sat down, thankful to be under cover, and decided to stay there till day-dawn. I looked at my watch by the flickering rush-light, and saw that it was ten minutes past eleven.

A quarter of an hour passed, the rush-light expired, and I, though miserably damp and uncomfortable, was dozing off, when the sound of approaching steps and voices awakened me. I listened attentively, perhaps in some degree anxiously, the place being so solitary, and it being well known that prisoners confined in Dartmoor Prison, the very worst class of criminals, not unfrequently escaped, and in two well-established instances, had murdered shepherds—not perhaps solely to possess themselves of such scanty sustenance as the huts contained, but to avoid the possibility of information of their escape being given to the authorities in time to commence successful pursuit.

The approaching voices were gruff, stern—three men's voices, at least one was that of a woman, and I heard, or fancied that I did, the wailing sobs of a child. I felt for my pistols, which, from habit, I never was without; ascertained that the oilskin sheathing protecting the powder from wet, had not slipped off, and watchfully waited the coming in of the party.

I had not many minutes to wait. Four men, a woman and a girl, entered the hut; and, by the strong light of a lantern carried by one of the men, I was enabled to view their features distinctly, through the crevice in the partition.

'Scape-gallows ruffians were three, if not all four of the



men; brawny, powerful fellows, too. The woman was as evidently a brazen, somewhat showy-looking harlot, about thirty years of age. The girl—one of the prettiest, most interesting ever seen, who could not have been at the most more than twelve summers—was as certainly the child of luxury; her frock and dress generally were of the finest material, and made up in the newest fashion for young ladies of her age.

How piteously pale she was! what a world of terror fluttered in those suffused, sweet, supplicating, soft blue eyes! Instinctively my hand crept as it were to the handle of one of my pistols and slipped off its oil casing. I had four barrels; each, unless my nerve failed me, carried a life. There was, would be, work to be done—work for me to do; and by Heaven I would do it!

Let not the reader imagine that it required any amount of Rinaldo courage to arrive at such a determination. There is scarcely a police officer in the kingdom who would not have so resolved without thinking for a moment that he was preparing to perform any highly heroic action. The truth is, that the abiding consciousness of having the "law" on your side, together with the indifference to danger which familiarity with it engenders, begets a kind of mechanical courage—perhaps mechanical is not the proper word, but I cannot for a moment think of one more appropriate—engenders, begets, I was saying, a sort of mechanical courage, which quails not before any ordinary—no, nor extraordinary—peril.

"Here we be, then," growled a bullet-headed ruffian, he who carried the lantern; "and now, after a sup and a bite, we'll go to business. The night's wearing on, and there's no time, not a precious moment, to be lost. The candle's out, I see, in your room. Don't keep on whimpering, Miss Dalton," he added, darting a ferocious look at the terrified, dumb-stricken young girl. "We sha'n't hurt ye, if we can make sure as you will never give tongue against us; but if not—why then, why not?"

"You ain't going, Bill Waters, to harm the young lady," said the woman. "I'll see your coffin walk before you hurt a hair of her head. That was the bargain, and you shall stick to it."

"Shut that tater-trap," replied Bill Waters. "Nobody wants to hurt the gal, if so be there's no 'casion for it. Now, then, get out the stuff."

"Get out the stuff yourselves. I shall light a fire to warm Miss Dalton, and dry her things."

So speaking, the woman took shavings and wood from a corner cupboard, and made haste to kindle a fire. The men at the same time took the "stuff" (brandy) and cold meat and bread from the same receptacle, and set to work voraciously.

What could be the true significance of that strange scene? Who were the men? Why had they brought that fair girl to such a lonely, desolate place? To murder her? That could hardly be their intention—their primary intention, at all events. It would have been easy enough to have disposed of her on the wild desert moor. Perhaps I should learn when their hunger and thirst were appeased.

Meanwhile, I held a half-cocked double-barreled pistol in each of my hands.

Long practice had enabled me to shoot almost as truly with the left as the right; and any attempt to harm her would, swift as lightning, bring a champion to the rescue, though she knew it not.

I felt very proud at that moment, I well remember, and totally forgot I was wet through to the skin.

The woman had kindled a good fire, and had drawn a stool close to it, upon which she placed Miss Dalton, rubbed her hands, and strove by soothing words to comfort the trembling captive.

She strove in vain.

The unfortunate girl did not appear to hear what she said; but sat motionless, the incarnation of helpless, hopeless dismay and horror.

It was hard to resist that silent, piteous appeal; to refrain from rushing upon the ruffians as they sat swilling and stuffing, and so end the affair at once.

Yes; but to so end it I must use my pistols—send a bullet through the heads of two of the men, at least—and that would hardly be justifiable till a murderous intent became more positively apparent.

Ha! they begin to talk; their tongues, loosened by drink, wag freely, though in undertones. I listen with both my ears, and hear a story which, in its seeming unreality, resembled the fictions of the *Family Herald*. There are many gaps in the narrative, but the main facts piece themselves out with sufficient clearness.

Madam Dalton, as they called the lady, was a wealthy widow, who resided at the Willows, a noble mansion—

which I had seen—situate about three miles from Exeter. She had one child, Rosalind—the fair girl cowering there in speechless terror—and the mother's idol. A Mr. Framley or Frampton (I could not catch the name distinctly, but that was of no consequence)—a Mr. Frampton or Framley having wooed the widow unsuccessfully, had hit on the cruel device of kidnaping the child, and retaining possession of her until Mrs. Dalton should not only consent to, but actually become his wife.

The people there were his agents. The reward promised was a large one, and by the wiles of the woman, who seemed, however, to have some compunctious visitings, the young lady was secretly carried off. This had been effected early the previous evening—by what precise mode was not mentioned.

I did not quite understand, either, how Mr. Frampton or Framley meant to play out his game, nor did the villains in his play. They appeared to entertain a suspicion that he really meant they should rid him forever of the rich widow's daughter, he having children of his own. And the suborned rascals had a game of *their* own. The woman—"Nance," they called her—would not, they seemed to be convinced, permit any violence to be done to the child; and, Frampton once married to Mrs. Dalton, they feared the promised reward might not be forthcoming unless they completed their work. Would it not be better, therefore, to open negotiations on their own account with Mrs. Dalton?

As they talked and talked, I fancied, was indeed sure, that I heard the sounds of horse's hoofs approaching the hut. One of the men evidently thought so too; he pricked up his ears, hearkened eagerly, and the sounds ceasing, stepped forth and peered into the thick night. Only darkness there. This was the man whom Nance called Bill Waters. He appeared to be the leading ruffian.

"I thought I heard his horse's hoofs," said Bill Waters; "but I suppose it must have been the pattering of the rain. He won't be here to-night. Well, I hardly thought he would. He's a slippery cove, he is, depend upon it; and desperate hard-up, I'm told. Yes, mates, we shall do better by treating with the lady ourselves."

They then resumed the interrupted conversation, and discussed quite loudly the likeliest mode of turning the possession of the stolen girl to the best account for themselves. Frampton should, it was finally determined, be flung overboard. Worse than that. Terms made with the wealthy widow, they would squeeze him as dry as a biscuit; make him shell out every sovereign he could rake together by hook or crook, as the price of their silence anent his share in the abduction of the young lady—who had, meanwhile, overcome with fatigue, and soothed, perhaps, by the crooning, low-voiced lullabies of Nance (Ann Thomas was her name), fallen fast asleep in the woman's arms.

There was not anything more of importance to be learned by continuing to listen to their conversation, and strongly suspecting that Frampton had really arrived, that those were his horse's hoofs which I had heard striking dully upon the rain-softened moor-turf, I crept softly out, by an aperture opening upon the bleak waste, from the inner room. It still rained hard, but the night was lighter. A few stars, now seen, now gone—for the wind had risen—showed themselves; and my eyes, presently accustomed to the gloom, could discover the outline of large objects at a considerable distance off.

By Jove! I was right. A horse was fastened by the bridle to a corner post connected with the hut itself by a horizontally-placed pole, forming one side of a quadrangle, intended, perhaps, to be one day cultivated by the shepherd-tenant. Where then was Frampton hiding himself? I had no doubt it was *his* horse. It was full half an hour since he had arrived. I would see where he was; so down I went upon all fours, and crawled cautiously toward the front opening, where I surmised he was to be found listening to the very interesting conversation going on within the hut.

Right again! A tall man, wearing a riding-cloak, was listening just without the doorway; that man, it could not be doubted, was Frampton. There would be a scene presently. It were well that I crept quietly back—kept myself ready for any part I might have to play therein.

There was a long lull in the men's conversation; they had exhausted the topic in which they felt so much interested, but not the "stuff"—which had already so muddled their brains that they would all four be soon heavily asleep. Were it not for the man watching without, and that I could not find my way across the moor, the rescue of Julia Dalton might have been easily, noiselessly effected.

The young girl still slept; though I was sure, from her



frequent nervous starts, that affrighting images pursued her in that sleep.

But a short time passed; and then ostentatious, heavy steps approached the entrance, and in came Mr. Frampton, with a heavy riding-whip in his hand.

"Hillo! you drunken rascals! Fast asleep, eh? or nearly so!"

Bill Waters jumped up, and muttered something to the effect that they had given up expecting him; but that "it was all right," pointing, as he said so, to the sleeping child.

"Of course it's all right! How could it be otherwise than right, after the instructions I gave you, unless you were the most blundering blockheads that ever breathed? But we won't talk business just now. I shall choose a soft plank" (the hut—a very unusual thing—was boarded), "and sleep here. It's an infernal night to be out in. Is there any place where I can put my horse under shelter?"

Bill Walters said there was; and, shaking himself fully awake, volunteered to put the animal up. He did so, and presently came back.

"I shall not have more than a couple of hours' snooze. The mare can find her way blindfold out of the moor, which is lucky. Come," he gayly added, shaking the large liquor jar, "here's plenty here yet. Fill me a pannikin"—they were drinking out of tin cups—"and replenish for yourselves."

The recommendation was cheerfully acquiesced to, and the drinking went on.

I noticed that the woman, Nance, obstinately refused to drink, though repeatedly pressed to do so by Frampton.

She continued to rock the fitfully slumbering [girl, and would, I felt sure, have done fierce battle on her behalf, had occasion required her to do so.

I saw, too, or my eyes deceived me (which is not generally the case), that Frampton, or Framley, dropped something liquid into the men's pannikins. It was very cleverly done, very, and the effect was soon apparent, decided.

The fellows' heads dropped like lumps of lead upon the table. Frampton had hounded them. Most likely it was laudanum he had administered. There was no necessity for doing so; it would not have been long before the brandy would have itself sealed their senses in forgetfulness.

However, the thing was done. The four men were for a time helpless—dead as logs of wood. Mr. Frampton, assured of that, rose suddenly to his feet, drew a pistol from his pocket, stepped up to "Nance," pointed the weapon at her head and said:

"Silence; not one word, or I blow your brains out! Make no outcry, no resistance, and you are safe. I have overheard the discourse of these sleeping scoundrels. They mean to betray me. I expected as much; but they will find their match. This girl goes with me, and now—Dare to scream or resist," he added fiercely, as the woman half-rose, "and you die upon the spot.

"I am a ruined, desperate man. That girl in my power, I shall be able to make my own terms. Her mother would give her life, more than her life, to embrace her. You understand, then, that for my own sake I shall not harm her. But she must go with me. You can tell those sodden scoundrels, when they recover from their drunken debauch, that if they hold their tongues, though I don't greatly care whether they do or don't, I shall keep my word with them.

"Now, young lady, let this lady wrap you up closely, for it rains hard, and it will not be long before you are in your mother's arms. Now, Nance, quick! There must be no delay, and no nonsense!"

Julia Dalton, rudely awakened and still under the influence of paralyzing terror, appeared scarcely to comprehend what was passing. The woman was terrified into submission, and wrapped her charge round about in her own shawl. I stole quietly round to the front entrance.

"Now, Miss Dalton!" said Framley, "let us begone. Come—come—no screaming! No harm is intended you; but you are in my power, and must submit to my will. In a short time you will call me father. We must ride double; but that will not be for long. Come! Silly fool, must I use force? Submit quietly, or by—Ha!"

The pistol was struck out of his hand, and, disarmed, shaking in every joint of his body, the catfiff confronted me. Never was man more startled—scared!

"Who the d—l may you be?" he presently exclaimed, at the same time kicking Bill Waters' shins in the hope of awakening him.

"I am Hawk-Eye, a detective officer. Will that descrip-

tion suffice? Miss Dalton, you will go home with me. The rain has nearly ceased, and within an hour I shall be able to procure you a more fitting conveyance than this baffled felon's horse. If you, Frampton, want the mare, which I was glad to hear you say could find her way blindfold out of this miserable moor, you will find her at the Willows. Whether, however, you call there or not, I shall be very angry with myself if I have not you by the heels before many hours have passed. Well thought of. I will take the liberty of helping myself, with your leave, to a nip of brandy; and let me persuade you, Miss Dalton, to take a little diluted spirit. You need it sadly. Ah! I understand. You are not sure that I may be trusted. Fortunately, I can remove your doubts. You must be acquainted with Lady Nugent, of the Grange. Her residence is not far from the Willows."

"Yes, oh, yes!" faintly responded the sweet, tremulous lips.

"This note, then, addressed to me at Exeter, where some one had informed her ladyship I was staying for a time, will satisfy you as to who I really am."

First swallowing a spoonful of brandy-and-water, Julia Dalton glanced at the note. Her eyes brightened immediately, and she held out her hand with artless, winning, infantine confidence.

"I remember all about it, and your name now. You will save me from these cruel men! Let us go."

Meanwhile Frampton had been glaring at us both with speechless rage. Not one moment, though speaking to Miss Dalton, had I taken my eye off the villain. He understood that look, and dared not stir.

"We will be off immediately, Miss Dalton; but I must first deprive this amiable gentleman of the means of mischief. The pistol on the floor I take with me of course. You have its fellow about your person, and I must have that! Turn out your pockets."

A ferocious gleam shot from the fellow's eyes, and he thrust his hand into the breast pocket of his coat.

"Don't try that game, Mr. Frampton!" I exclaimed. "You won't have time, indeed you won't! This is a hair trigger which my finger so nearly touches. Withdraw that hand of yours and permit me to insert my own. Ah! the fellow-pistol. I thought so. Permit me, moreover, to feel your other pockets. All right. Now, young lady, please to accept my arm. Good night, Mr. Frampton or Framley. I shall have the pleasure of again making your acquaintance before long."

The horse was nowhere to be seen—had, no doubt, broken loose. This was terrible. The rain had ceased, but it was still dark as a wolf's mouth, and day would not break for at least four dreary hours; the ruffians, before that time had expired, might be awakened, and if not beyond their reach, I should have fearful odds to contend with. Well, not such great odds. They had no firearms, neither gun nor pistol, I was pretty sure; and supposing us to be overtaken, or in imminent danger of being overtaken, the very device was in it if I couldn't place myself in a position of vantage which would make the scoundrels think more than twice before they attacked me. Away then with good courage; we should pull through.

Extinguishing the lantern I had borrowed, I, tightly clutching the trembling girl by the arm, again addressed myself to the task of finding the river. For a long, long time I was unsuccessful as before, but at length I was unmistakably upon the shelving bank of the Dart. It was time, for Julia Dalton had become almost insensible with fatigue and fear.

It was still dark as ever, and I lay down to stretch forth my hand into the stream to feel which way it was running, so that, keeping on the bank, we might follow its course. That point was soon settled; and speaking cheerfully to the jaded, worn-out maiden, I got her slowly along for perhaps half a mile.

By then she was perfectly exhausted—could go no farther. Her stomach rejected the brandy, and there was nothing for it but to sit down on the wet moor and wait for day. And would day bring relief? I feared not, till too late!

The next two hours seemed forty, so slowly did they limp away. The sweet, dear child, seated on my knees, moaned brokenly in feverish unrest; and I myself was shivering with cold and wet when the new day, pencilling itself upon the northeast horizon, gave me back strength, courage, life.

Whilst Julia Dalton slept, if physical and mental prostration could be called sleep, I had contrived to pour a little brandy down her throat, and I was in hopes she would soon be sufficiently restored to go on.



The day was broadening. Very soon I should be able to discern foot-tracks across the desolate moor; and I was speaking words of comfort to the sweet maiden, who clung to me so confidently, when loud shouts struck my ear. Frampton, mounted on horseback, and accompanied by his filthy ruffians, had descried us and counted upon an easy recapture. Fools!

On they came, shouting, gesticulating fiercely.

"Give up that girl, you scoundrel!" exclaimed Frampton, stopping short when within about twenty paces, "and your rascally self may go free."

"I don't exactly hear, Mr. Frampton. What do you propose? I sha'n't stand very stiffly out if you promise not to harm the young lady."

"No one ever meant to harm her. Go away," went on Frampton, coming several paces nearer; "leave her in our hands, and afterward do your work. Your answer. Quick!"

"You have it!" said I, raising a pistol and firing at the instant. The fellow tumbled off his horse with a scream of agony. He was not, however, which I was glad of, killed. The bullet had struck and broken his right jaw, nothing more.

The men stood silently staring at each other, their brains still muddled, cloudy with the drugged drink they had swallowed. What, after all, could they have done? Rushed upon me? Yes, but two at least in that case would have been sent to kingdom come, and which two being doubtful was disheartening.

"I don't want to shoot you," I exclaimed, "though I easily could. Catch and hold the mare."

Bill Waters caught at and secured the bridle.

"Bring her here. I shall not harm you. The others must stand farther off. Help me to place the young lady in the saddle."

The man obeyed, and Miss Dalton was comfortably secured in her seat.

"That will do; now look to your own yet unchanged employer. Good morning," and on we went at a smartish pace, I jog-trotting alongside the mare.

We were soon quit of the moor; medical ministrations were obtained for Julia Dalton, and when I left the village at which we had rested, the restored child was soundly asleep, watched over with beaming eyes by her devoutly-rejoicing, grateful mother. There were no steps taken to bring Frampton to justice, which vexed me.

[THE END.]

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